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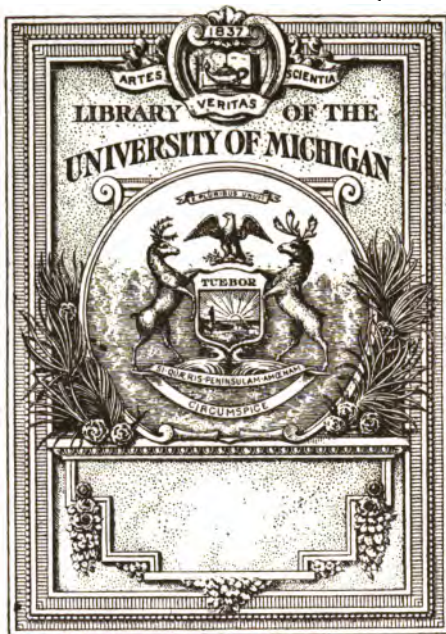
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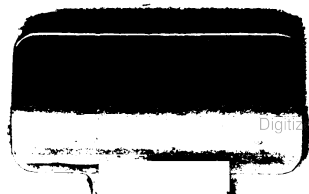
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E I G H T
S E R M O N S

PREACHED BEFORE THE
UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD,
IN THE YEAR 1783,

AT THE LECTURE FOUNDED BY THE
REV. JOHN BAMPTON, M.A.
LATE CANON OF SALISBURY.

BY JOHN COBB, D.D.
FELLOW OF ST. JOHN'S COLLEGE.

—γνώσεσθε τὴν ἀλήθειαν, καὶ ἡ ἀλήθεια ἐλευθερώσει ὑμᾶς.

Jo. c. 8. v. 32.

O X F O R D,

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IMPRIMATUR,

S A M. D E N N I S,

Vice-Can. Oxon.

June 5. 1783.

1 Nov. 1918 E.H.V.

TO THE REVEREND
THE HEADS OF COLLEGES,
THE FOLLOWING SERMONS,
PREACHED
AT THEIR APPOINTMENT,
ARE,
WITH GREAT RESPECT,
INSCRIBED.

327147

Extract from the last Will and Testament of the late Reverend JOHN BAMPTON, Canon of Salisbury.

—— “ I give and bequeath my Lands
“ and Estates to the Chancellor, Masters,
“ and Scholars of the University of Oxford
“ for ever, to have and to hold all and singular the said Lands or Estates upon trust,
“ and to the intents and purposes herein after-
“ mentioned; that is to say, I will and appoint, that the Vice-Chancellor of the
“ University of Oxford for the time being
“ shall take and receive all the rents, issues,
“ and profits thereof, and (after all taxes,
“ reparations, and necessary deductions made)
“ that he pay all the remainder to the endowment of eight Divinity Lecture Sermons, to be established for ever in the said
“ University, and to be performed in the
“ manner following :

“ I direct and appoint, that, upon the first
“ Tuesday in Easter term, a Lecturer be
“ yearly chosen by the Heads of Colleges
“ only, and by no others, in the room adjoining to the Printing-House, between
“ the

“ the hours of ten in the morning and two
“ in the afternoon, to preach eight Divinity
“ Lecture Sermons, the year following, at
“ St. Mary’s in Oxford, between the com-
“ mencement of the last month in Lent
“ Term, and the end of the third week in
“ Act Term.

“ Also I direct and appoint, that the eight
“ Divinity Lecture Sermons shall be preach-
“ ed upon either of the following subjects
“ — to confirm and establish the Christian
“ Faith, and to confute all heretics and schif-
“ matics—upon the divine authority of the
“ Holy Scriptures — upon the authority of
“ the writings of the primitive Fathers, as
“ to the faith and practice of the primitive
“ Church — upon the Divinity of our Lord
“ and Saviour Jesus Christ—upon the Divi-
“ nity of the Holy Ghost—upon the Articles
“ of the Christian Faith, as comprehended
“ in the Apostles’ and Nicene Creeds.

“ Also I direct, that thirty copies of the
“ eight Divinity Lecture Sermons shall be
“ always printed, within two months after
“ they are preached, and one copy shall be
“ given to the Chancellor of the University,
“ and one copy to the Head of every Col-
“ lege, and one copy to the Mayor of the
“ City

“ City of Oxford, and one copy to be put
“ into the Bodleian Library; and the ex-
“ pence of printing them shall be paid out
“ of the revenue of the Lands or Estates
“ given for establishing the Divinity Lecture
“ Sermons; and the Preacher shall not be
“ paid, nor be entitled to the revenue, before
“ they are printed.

“ Also I direct and appoint, that no person
“ shall be qualified to preach the Divinity
“ Lecture Sermons, unless he hath taken the
“ Degree of Master of Arts at least, in one
“ of the two Universities of Oxford or Cam-
“ bridge; and that the same person shall
“ never preach the Divinity Lecture Sermons
“ twice.”

“ **H**OW may a man qualify himself,
“ so as to be able to judge for him-
“ self, of the other religions profest in
“ the world; to settle his own opinions
“ in disputable matters; and then to enjoy
“ tranquillity of mind, neither disturbing
“ others, nor being disturbed at what passes
“ among them ? ”

Woolaston's third Question. See the Religion
of Nature delineated.

C O N T E N T S.

S E R M O N I.

An Inquiry after Happiness.

M A T T. VI. 21.

For where your treasure is there will your heart be also. — — Page 1.

Tranquillity in life is not to be maintained without prudence ; nor without the persuasion of the being and providence of GOD ; nor without religion. Rational happiness is not found in riches, honour, pleasure, or in contemplation. It is only to be found in consciousness ; yet not complete without the hope of immortality.

S E R M O N II.

Natural Religion.

I C O R. I. 19.

It is written: I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent. — 27

Rational systematical religion is incompetent to the purposes of the inquiry. Philosophy or rational systems being abstruse and speculative, and also uncertain and various. Prudence is the only rational religion, truly so called. This is competent as such, in itself, to a moral agent. But man is a transgressor : and this religion is not adapted to such a character.

b

S E R-

S E R M O N III.

The Gospel.

M A T T. XI. 28.

Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. — 53

The gospel is an act of grace ; and the religion of sinners. The christian religion was not delivered in a system : it does not add to the law of reason ; nor supersede the rational law. Yet it is not justly defined, as the restoration of natural religion. The argument of its internal evidence is limited in its application.—Christ is the author of new methods of sanctification.

S E R M O N IV.

Repentance.

L U K E XIV. 24.

Whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple. 79

Repentance is requisite to the perception of christian truth : for the state of mind of the natural man is such as bars it against the reception of truth.—The duty of repentance is not absolute. The mortification of evil propensity implies, not a separation from all false notion ; but denial of conceit : and this, not in one act ; but habitual. What is said of sensual prejudice is also to be applied to intellectual conceit : and, in like manner, to the conceit of moral excellence.—Reformation is effected gradually.

S E R-

C O N T E N T S.

iii

S E R M O N V.

Faith.

G A L. II. 20.

*The life I now live in the flesh I live by the
faith of the son of God, who loved me, and
gave himself for me. — — 105*

Faith is a duty peculiar to revelation : but moral qualities are rendered doubtful by the words that express them. What was Abraham's faith ? What Jacob's. What the confession required by Christ ? Faith lies in assent, but is not bounded therein : assent is the faith of the convert ; but the faith of the christian is conformity.—The virtue has been variously defined. It is a moral virtue : a reasonable service, and also inclusive of all christian virtue.

S E R M O N VI.

Professional Faith.

2 P E T. III. 18.

*Grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our
Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. — 131*

Faith is speculative and professional. Assent is the first act of such faith. The gospel was delivered in parables.—All faith originates in repentance. There are degrees of professional faith.—Knowledge is necessary. Christian knowledge has for its objects : the necessary articles of confession, and a clear conception of the precepts.—Difficulties arise in the pursuit ; because allegories are difficult to explain and apply ; many discourses of our Lord were designedly obscure ; some doctrines

doctrines were adapted to apostolic times. Difficulties arise also from the language of the sacred writers, and from the nature of prophecy. But the greatest obstruction to christian knowledge ariseth from foolish and unlearned questions. Judicious knowledge is not found, but with modesty ; especially in the present state of confession.

S E R M O N VII.

Practical Faith.

J A M E S I. 22.

*Be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only,
deceiving your own selves. — 161*

Faith is a practical virtue, properly so called. The ascetic's life was injudicious. Christian morality is not to be learned from systems : it is laid down in the precepts of sobriety, righteousness and godliness. These virtues are allied and inseparable.

S E R M O N VIII.

The Christian's Privileges.

M A T T. VI. 24.

*Whoever heareth these sayings of mine and
doeth them, I will liken him to a wise man
that built his house upon a rock. — 185*

Professional and practical faith are not judiciously separated. — The christian's qualifications are truly excellent. — The state of men taken into the church in primitive and modern times is different : this calls for a different mode of institution. The christian's privileges are free inquiry, wisdom, prudence, settled judgment, peace. —

S E R M O N I.

M A T T. VI. 21.

*For where your Treasure is, there will your
Heart be also.*

THE happiness and tranquillity of human life, depend so manifestly upon the prudent conduct of it; that however the ancient philosophers might differ, in forming the principle on which it should be conducted, none of them ever maintained that it was safer or more judicious to turn their backs on all principle, and act at random. Even Epicurus has been slandered, wherever it has been said of him, that he denied the obligations to moral virtue. For if he boasted that he had broken the fetters of superstition and taken away the fear of GOD, when he represented the supreme Being as too happy to concern himself with what is passing here ;
A if

if he recommended to man, as his great object, to pursue continual pleasure, or a state of tranquillity: still he left the moral virtues in sufficient force, if not to secure the favour of God, and the divine protection and rewards; yet to promote the peace and welfare of a man's self, considered both as an individual, and a member of society. For he well knew^a, that the mind is not to be possessed in serenity, unless a strict self-government be maintained: that for want of it the natural appetites become turbulent, and raise the most violent commotions there: that as a city in an insurrection, and a private family in domestic strife; so the mind, agitated by passions that are under no control, cannot possibly enjoy any rest or quiet. And moreover, that since man, in society is intimately connected with man, and their interests bound up together; the social obligations cannot be dispensed with, as they are so much adapted to conciliate kindness and favour, to produce an intercourse of good and friendly offices, and to prevent one man from vexing and interfering with another. It is therefore the maxim of Epicurus^b that no wise (or prudent) man

^a Cic. de Fin. L. I. §. 18. p. 59.

^b Cic. de Fin.

can

can fail of obtaining happiness, which eludes the pursuit of all mankind besides. Such were the sentiments of that philosopher, whose whole study it was to exalt the enjoyments of life; to preserve it, unincumbered even with the obligations of religion: and who allowed (not without reluctance) only those restraints to voluptuous indulgence, which experience taught him to be necessary to secure, to prolong the gratification. There is not therefore the authority of Epicurus, and if not of him, of no school of philosophy certainly, to be pleaded in excuse for those, who lead their lives without prudence^c, without proposing to themselves some rational end to pursue, and taking pains to fall into the track that leads to it. Wherefore, as far as the argument taken from the common sense, reason, and experience of all mankind is conclusive (which in questions of expediency ought to have the first weight) so far is it injudicious, to tread the paths of life at random, to forsake the guidance of prudence; and as^d herds of cattle, to wander without discretion, not where a spot of more tempting herbage invites them, but where fancy im-

^c Seneca de Vitâ beatâ.^d Vitâ beatâ.

pels them, that is to be reduced to no rational principle whatever.

But what is that philosophy, which excludes the supreme Being, from the care and direction of the universe? *It breaks the bonds, 'tis true, of piety, sanctity and religion; and renders worship, devotion, and prayer, needless and unavailing services. But then it roots up at the same time all the enjoyment of life: destroying the satisfaction of a prosperous state, by rendering the possession insecure, and depriving the miserable, of his only refuge and consolation. For a being, inconsiderable, as an individual man, in the universe, desirous above all things, by the law of his nature, to preserve his existence; yet obnoxious, in an extreme, to injury and destruction from every quarter, is a most forlorn and abject creature, without the protection of a governor of the world. On this supposition, the state of man is even worse than that of every other species in the animal world. They are all subject alike to the law of self preservation, the first law, the most ruling passion of their nature: and they are all individually weak, and insufficient for that purpose. But the

* Cic. de Nat. Deor.

irrational

irrational species seem neither to be tortured with the recollection of past evils, nor the apprehension of those to come: while man's boasted reason, and the faculty of prudence which distinguishes him, enable him to look forward to the consequences of things. By this foresight he perceives the approach of danger, and views the progress of calamities still remote; thus anticipating evils, that are brought on him by natural or moral causes, which neither his skill can elude, or his power control. Though the supreme Being has so amply furnished every habitable part of the globe with the necessary accommodations for human life; yet is every clime, every season, and every station obnoxious to its peculiar calamities. In some countries earthquakes, in others tempests, in others famine and pestilence desolate populous regions, and sweep off the miserable inhabitants: in all, unfruitful seasons, and accidental calamities, at one time, blast the fortunes of individuals; at another, spread a general misfortune. When the peasant, at the foot of Vesuvius, beholds the burning torrent descending, or the havock made in the fertile lands of another husbandman: why does he securely cultivate his own fields, which the next eruption may render de-

folate; why not rather flee from this land of terror, and desert his precarious habitation? The confidence that is necessary to encourage him to persist in his course of industry; and to induce every man, in this state of uncertain tenure, not to desert every office in life that looks beyond the present moment, can only rationally be derived from the persuasion, that the preservation of man, a creature formed not sufficient to himself, is, and must be, an object, by no means foreign from the attention of the author of his nature.

Or, if the evils that fall on man, from natural causes be not enough; let those that spring from the disorderly passions of mankind be taken also into the account. From man's ungoverned appetites, his lust of power, of wealth, of gratification, wars arise; and tumults, rapine, murder, treason, violence depopulate regions endowed with the richest gifts of nature. And even abstracting public calamities, and the themes of the tragic muse^f; those perplexities, which have furnished subjects for comic entertainment, are not less baneful to the comfort of life: domestic jars, the ill offices of neighbours,

^f Harris on Happiness.

mortifi-

mortifications, jealousies, suspicions, which are produced, in consequence of the same disorders, in private life. In short, the whole world is full of uncertainty, and prosperous and untoward events are dealt promiscuously for ever. Life, begun with the most flattering omens, frequently closes in calamity, and the fairest prospects are quickly shut in, by a dark and gloomy succession of disasters. Under this impression of the precarious tenure on which the whole of man's portion here is possessed, the most disconsolate reflections must arise in every considerate mind, the most dispiriting presages, the most enervating terrors, but for reliance on the protection of that supreme Being, who alone can be an effectual support to man through the paths of life, a sure guardian in dangers, and refuge in distresses. For it is an overruling providence alone, which can preserve the frail bark that sails in a tempestuous ocean; even that providence which can allay the storm, or command the waves that threaten to dash it in pieces, to waft it safely to its port.

But if the rational security of life can only be derived from the persuasion of divine providence and from trust in G O D; the consolation will belong to those, and those only, who

who study to serve and please him and to do his will. The rest of mankind, from this principle, may find reason for compunction, for terror and apprehension; but peace of mind can only follow a conformity to religion. For if the distinction between good and evil be really in the will of GOD: if^a that unseen arbiter of human destiny delight in virtue: if vice be abhorrent from his essential attributes; he cannot express his sentiments towards each respectively, without making a discrimination between those who act agreeably to his will, and those who do the contrary. Rational tranquillity is only therefore to be found in an habitual attention and conformity to religion; nor will any outward circumstances compensate for a defect in this respect, or furnish permanent enjoyment without it. For though a man could command whatever is vulgarly esteemed, though riches, honour, pleasure should crown his labours; still he^b must seek in religion, after all, for that satisfaction of mind, without which, these are of no estimation.

When the author of nature ennobled man, above every other species in the animal

^a Aristot. Eth. ad Nicom.

^b Sophoc. Antigo.

world,

world, with the valuable endowments of the mind; he gave him a duty and an interest above them, to result from the cultivation and improvement and the due exercise of his rational powers: and moreover a superior instinct, that mere animal and sensual gratifications should not satisfy his natural desires. To every creature he has imparted appetites to impel them to act as the purposes of their creation, and their exigencies may require: but to man, together with senses and passions, an intellect besides; that he alone of all the animal species, should form a moral character. By this endowment man is constituted the artificer of his own happiness; made to pursue the natural objects of desire, not as the brute species, having respect only to present and animal gratifications; but constructing in his comprehensive judgment, a plan for the conduct of the whole of his existence, and for securing the welfare not of that portion alone which is visible; but, by a natural presentiment, of an existence extending far beyond this present scene, to indefinite if not eternal duration. To this comprehensive judgment it must be attributed (for if not to this, it must be to a divine impression) that not only natural good (whatever immediately conduces

duces to the welfare of the animal nature) becomes an object of desire, but also moral good: in short, it is owing to this distinguishing faculty, that what becomes a man, is placed high in his estimation not less than what is obviously advantageous to him. It is thus, by the application of his prudence, and his discretion, that man is to complete his character, the outlines of which, as a painter's disciple, he has received from nature;¹ for ever looking to the copy that this his true wisdom as a master has given him to imitate. It is thus he guides his conduct by general principles, abstracted it may be from present motives, and the sensible objects of selfish or immediate interest: principles moreover that have regard to the whole period of his existence, and respect every relation in which he stands, and by which he may be affected. But what is² first in nature, is not first to man. For in nature the order of existences descends from Genera, through Species to Particulars: but man receiving his first conceptions through the medium of his senses, is long acquainted with particulars, before he abstracts himself

¹ Harris on Hap. Cic. de Fin. L. IV. § XIII. p. 304. hanc intuens.

² Harris's Hermes. Aristotl. Phys.

to far as to ascend to generals, or take a comprehensive view of the system in which he has a station. Hence it is, ¹that, though it be the first principle in human prudence to preserve itself in its best state: yet in the infancy of the mind this principle is confused, whilst it is not ascertained, either what that preservation implies, or what is the extent of the powers which are to be preserved, or what the nature be, that is the subject from which the character is to be formed. It is by degrees the mind expands itself, to comprehend how outward things affect it, and in what rank of importance, they stand to it. From hence may be seen the reason why riches, dignities, pleasure and contemplation captivate so large a portion of mankind, while these objects hold forth to view an obvious, palpable, and immediate gratification. Insnared by the meretricious arts of these allurements, a great part of our species place their treasure^m and their hearts in these pursuits, and stop short of the consultation of true ethic prudence, satisfied with the gratifications, of which wealth, power, pleasure or contemplation promise to put them into immediate pos-

¹ Cic. de Fin. L. V. §. IX. p. 369.

^m Matt. c. 6. v. 21.

session.

feffion. But of all thefe, when eftimated truly, there is not one that deferves to be purfued for its own fake; not one, that can fecure a ftate of enjoyment fuitable to the excellent faculties of man: though they all confeffedly have fomething defirable, that they can lend in aid to this purpofe. Thefe, it is true, are grofs and vulgar deceptions; yet grofs and vulgar as they are, they not only prevail with a great part of our fpecies; but alfo, where a more refined fentiment is pretended, even amongft philofophers, and where a primary influence is, in words, denied them: when they are admitted as fecondary objects, they too often encroach upon the more reasonable and primary, drawing away the largeft fhare of the affections to themfelves. ^a Thus it is, that in a life of bufinefs, gain or glory are avowedly, or in fact the ftimulating paffion, for the moft part; or where leifure is cultivated, it is, in order that men may be vacant to the purpofes of pleafure, or of fpeculation.

With refpect to the lucrative life and to wealth its object: this is not the certain reward of induftry; neither infallibly to be acquired, nor poffeffed with fecurity: and

^a Harris.

as to the satisfaction that riches can confer in themselves, “° There is no good in them “to their owners, (as Solomon observes) “sating the beholding of them with their “eyes.” The same observations are equally applicable to the political life, and to power its object: power is not to be obtained with certainty, nor securely to be enjoyed, as the historic page abundantly exemplifies. And the satisfaction produced immediately by dignities, is to be sought in splendor, attendance, the gaze and envy of beholders; from all which, there is no substantial good to be derived, to satisfy the natural wants or wishes of mankind. „^p In the pursuit both of “wealth and power, want of opportunity, “or superior skill, and the craft and knavery of competitors, perpetually disappoint and dupe those who wish to attain “an eminent share of them; and who even “have no objection to barter honour and public interest for them. It is not so in the paths “of virtue and religion: here, there is room “enough for all, and men may pursue their “good things without any inconvenience to “each other. But the vicious world is not “wide enough for those who would be emi-

° Ecclef. c. 5. v. 11.

^p Jortin, V. III. Serm. 9.

“ nent

“ nent in it : for the cravings of every one “ are insatiable,” and there is no boundary to selfish wishes. Thus the worldly are ever pushing forward, like travellers over the mountains, while they fancy that the next point in view will terminate the labour of ascending : but when they seem to have reached the summit, they find other eminences still rising in succession, to be surmounted with equal difficulty, and to reward their toil with equal dissatisfaction. But turn in the next place to the pleasurable and let wealth and power be pursued, not for their own sakes, but for the conveniences and the secure enjoyment they seem to command. And let it be supposed also (in opposition to constant experience) that the worldly mind, when it has obtained a competency, ^a shall address itself to enjoy in ease, leisure and relaxation the only reward it seeks. Still how vain the pursuit ? “ ‘ If, “ in the acquisition of riches and honour, “ health be forfeited or the esteem of man- “ kind ; or if the acquisition be not com- “ pleted till old age bring infirmities, de- “ crepitude, loss and decay of senses with “ it :” in either case, ease and relaxation

^a Luke c. 12. v. 19.

^r Jortin.

become

become the unsubstantial phantoms of imagination; and leisure brings no enjoyment; but disgust, spleen and discontent attend upon it, more fatiguing to the body and the mind, than the hardest labour and most abject drudgery. But let the gay voluptuary enter life in the most enviable circumstances; with an ample patrimony, sufficient to furnish in great abundance a festive and luxurious board; and with a resolution to gratify every appetite, and forego no delight that this world affords. What will the sum total of his happiness amount to, either in the pursuit or result? In the perception, the pleasures of sense produce an exquisite gratification, like some pungent odors: but the gratification is transient and momentary, succeeded by lassitude and disgust. During his pursuit the voluptuary^a is not to be seen in the public walks, where patriot virtue, industry, credit, fortitude, justice, manhood delight to appear; but in the stews, enervated by effeminate indulgence, surrounded with harlots, parasites, and the apparatus of gluttony, luxury and intemperance; stretched on the soft beds of indolence, covered with perfumes, and ineffectually lulled to slum-

^a Cic. de Fin. L. II.

bers

bers by the voice of musick. If this be the rational happiness of man, who, but fools, are to take care of the public welfare? But view the train that follows: sickness, racking pains, disorders in numberless frightful shapes succeed; premature old age, swift decay of sense and faculties, insatiable appetite, attended by spleen and loathing of every fulsome pleasure.

The speculative life remains, in which refinement of taste, and an exquisite knowledge, seem to promise a more rational satisfaction. But what are the pleasures of speculation? What are they in cultivation? What in consummation? In contemplation terminating in theory, men seek the pleasures of tracing every branch of science, of pursuing truth beyond obvious and vulgar comprehension to her remote recesses, of abstracting, of compounding ideas, and framing systems and conceptions far exceeding whatever the herd of mankind can imagine. From hence there may very possibly result to the visionary speculatist an exquisite complacency, attended with an elation of mind, which reflections, or an imagined intellectual superiority over the rest of mankind, may produce. And to the man of contemplation moreover, in his closet, this may appear a full

full recompense for all his labours. But change the scene, and how fantastic will this unsubstantial vision then appear? The world is not calculated to gratify the speculatist. The hours of contemplation are quickly succeeded by calls into common life. The natural wants, the necessary cares of man's station here, break the short slumbers of visionary enjoyment, and oblige the recluse votary of contemplative pleasure, to come out reluctantly, into the world. There he meets with the common accidents of life, but he meets them with a resolution debilitated by disuse, with nerves unstrung by inactivity of body, and with a mind too easily ruffled by opposition, from a vain conceit of its own excellence and superiority.

Not one of these worldly objects therefore, these idols, which hold so large a portion of mankind enslaved, is worthy to engross our hearts. "Happy is it for us
 " that the unworthiness is so apparent, ' for
 " how should we dote upon the world, were
 " its imperfections less conspicuous, when
 " we love it still false and ungrateful as it
 " is?" Though the hazard is so apparent,

^t O Munde, teneri vis pergens: quid faceres si remaneres? Quàm non deciperes dulcis: si amarus Alimenta mentiris? Augustinus.

B

we

we can hardly turn our ear from the Siren's song, or refuse the cup of the *inchantrefs*", though we know, that however it may intoxicate, it cannot satisfy our natural desires. Strange effect of infatuation! And yet in all this survey, the course of events has been supposed to follow the wishes and expectations of men in an even train; and life not to be ruffled by any untoward accident, or any intervening evil.

But that man has a very poor chance for happiness in life, whose plan is only calculated to give him pleasure in the fair and prosperous seasons of it. No object of pursuit deserves to be placed in the first rate of estimation, that will not answer a description, similar to that given to the liberal arts, by Cicero." "A principle that may
 "be adapted to all seasons, to every period
 "and every station: a principle that will
 "nourish and bring up youth, and give pleasure
 "in old age: that will add dignity and
 "ornament to prosperous circumstances, and
 "afford refuge and consolation in adversity:
 "that will furnish delight to private life,
 "and prove no interruption in a public
 "station: that will shed a grateful influence

^u Circe.

^w *Pro Arch. Poetâ.*

“on our couch, our journeyings, our retirement.” But the objects of worldly desire will in none of these respects answer the expectation of their votary. On the contrary, in youth they corrupt and debauch the mind, and poison it in old age with spleen and vexation; adding besides, to the weight of its natural infirmities, a pungent sorrow, that life must be quitted so soon. So far from giving dignity to success, they fill the mind with narrow passions, producing self-conceit, pride and insolence, with various other unbecoming dispositions; in adversity they leave their votary to struggle unsupported, with the complicated mortifications of disappointment and distress without resource. To private life they annex splendour indeed, and luxury, with those multiplied appetites of refined taste that fill her sickly train; to public life, pomp with vulgar admiration: but to neither, satisfaction or contentment. They banish sleep, fill the road with apprehension, the retirement with terror. Where then is the principle to be found worthy to be entrusted with the conduct of human life? How shall man form his ruling passion? Where fix his hopes, his wishes and desires? Or where can he find a happiness adapted to his nature?

B 2

ture?

ture? A happiness, it must be, fixed and permanent, unlike the fleeting gratifications of sense: a happiness built on solid^{*} and immoveable foundations, unlike the delusive hopes, the insecure possessions, with which those prevalent idols of the world beguile so many of our species.

In all mechanical arts, and in all exertions of genius and taste, the object is to produce some work, perfect and complete in its kind, to remain when finished, subservient to the convenience of the artist; or, a specimen of his own skill and a model for future artists. But is the same remark true of the exertions of prudence? Is there a definite period or summit of improvement, with which, when attained, the mind may sit down satisfied, in the enjoyment or contemplation of the exquisite character it has exhibited? Surely the art of forming human life is not such. For (considering it without any respect save to what passes here (every period of it requires a peculiar cultivation; and the conduct of life is a task never finished, till the close of it removes man from this, at least, if not to another sphere. The happiness of this life therefore, and present

^{*} Matt. c. 6.

reward

reward of moral virtue (if such there be) as they are not evidently to be found in the finished work, must lie in the continual improvement, and those exertions by which the character is daily rendered more accomplished. And as the punishment of guilt lies' not in pain of body, or misfortune, both of which may happen to a good man ; but in the consciousness of crimes, with its train of depression of mind, and confused, infatuated, distempered understanding: so, on the contrary, the reward of prudence, lies in approbation of conscience, the upright mind, the serene judgment that attend it. When the Decii devoted themselves for their country, and when Mutius^a exhibited that remarkable instance of Roman fortitude before Porfenna: it was the consciousness of the value of the action, that supported those patriots in the article of death; this last in the agony he sustained. ^b Even Epicurus found in consciousness, resource against violent pain in the close of his life; and though he could not entertain any hopes of immortality, consistently with the doctrines he had taught; yet in his letters, he pro-

^γ Cic. in Pifo. §. 20. vid. Not.

L. V. ^a Scaevola.

§. 30. p. 173.

^z Juvenal, Sat. I.

^b Harris. Cic. de Fin. L. II.

fed himself supported under his sufferings, by the recollection of the system he had framed. But what shall we say of Mr Hume? Did a similar consciousness support this imitator of Epicurus, this modern foe to superstition? He certainly possessed it, if he was not without consolation in his last moments. But it could not be. No habit, no prejudice will account for such a monstrous supposition. For what intolerable conceit, what arrogance not to be endured, must there have been in the man, who could derive such inward support from the reflection that he had treated contemptuously a doctrine held sacred, as a revelation of God's will, by the most considerate, the most virtuous, the best esteemed of mankind? The happiness of life then (if such there be) is placed in consciousness, consciousness of conducting it by the best principles, of performing every office, of practising virtue, of adhering to religion. And here a happiness arises suited to all times, every station and every age: this also is capable of furnishing delight equally to youth and to old age: it will give lustre to a prosperous station, dignity in adversity: it is applicable equally to domestic and public life: and will give balm to sleep, cheerfulness in travel and retirement.

tirement. This is a reward also annexed invariably to moral virtue, and to that alone, a prize not in the power of fortune to bestow indiscriminately.

But it is impossible nevertheless to rest here. The business of human life is not conducted without labour. To bring the irregular appetites into subjection, to construct a reasonable plan for the conduct of life, to pursue it through every period, through good and bad fortune, through all stations, through perplexities, distresses, obstructions almost irresistible: are not performed without painful application, and unwearied assiduity. The husbandman, the mechanic, the artist, have it each in view, that when they have finished the business of the day, the hours of diligence shall be succeeded by relaxation; and their care bestowed, crowned with an equal recompense. But man, (if in this life only he has hope) has the labour without the rest: the mortification, when he has with infinite pain, formed his character to virtuous habits, and subdued in a great measure the difficulties of his moral task: and when now at length, he hopes to find the fair guerdon of his

° Mylton's Lycidas.

labours,

labours, and enjoy a tranquil remainder of life in the praise and practice of virtue, the fates rush in, and snatch the delicious, well earned morsel from him. Epicurus spake therefore but the language of nature, when he placed the recompense of wisdom, of prudence, of virtue, in tranquil peaceful enjoyment.

But all nature speaks one language, that life is not the season of this enjoyment, and natural desire points out a future state to man, when the supreme remunerator shall, in his allotment of his moral creatures, make a just and equal discrimination between them, according to their moral qualifications. For there is in our natural propensities, an inseparable love of existence, and an abhorrence from the thought of parting with it. Passions that affect^a every individual of our species in every stage of life, when fourscore years have passed, not less, than before he has seen twenty revolutions. The reward of consciousness is not therefore man's ultimate object. It is an earnest of the favour of his maker, a foretaste of future recompense. It is a present encouragement to do his duty, that though evils attend the practice of

^a Cic. de Fin. L. V. §. 11.

virtue,

virtue, “the good man is satisfied from himself.” Than this satisfaction no greater inducement to perseverance can be found, no greater consolation under the pressure of real evils. Such are the intimations, by which the will of our great master is naturally discerned: and thus are we induced, by the comfort, the admonition, the exhortation of this his voice within us, to perform every office; till it shall please him to translate us from this place to that unknown country, where his providence will still follow us, to recompense every man according to his works.

It is this last persuasion that removes the gloom and every thing disconsolate from the prospect of impending dissolution: this too, renders the passive virtues of obedience, a practicable, a reasonable, nay a chearful service. It was this that made Socrates’ acquiesce, unmoved, in the divine will, when he was called forward to set an example of suffering; and this induced him to think no period of life premature, that was ordained by the supreme disposer of all things.

The whole result of our inquiries, therefore, is: that it is from religion alone

° Prov. c. 14. v. 14.

† Plato. Apol.

man

man can obtain satisfaction in life, and derive peace and tranquillity of mind; and from thence alone at the close of it, can quit this scene in possession of real repose and effectual consolation.

SER-

S E R M O N II.

I. C O R. I. 19.

It is written: I will destroy the Wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the Understanding of the prudent.

THE friendship of the world, though attended, without doubt, with many conveniences, deserves not to be pursued as the most material interest of a human creature. A good answerable to the universal preconceptions of mankind in a far higher degree, is to be found in the consciousness of virtue. But it is not even with this that the mind can rest satisfied as its ultimate object: since the natural desires of man carry him out of this period, to be solicitous for his well-being in a future state, a period of no limited duration. To
point

point out by what conduct this present and future welfare may be obtained, is the province of religion. But since there are various systems which profess to teach men the art of conducting life, the following seems to be a question of the first importance. "How
" a man may qualify himself, so as to be
" able to judge, for himself, of the religions
" professed in the world; to settle his own
" opinions in disputable matters; and then
" to enjoy tranquillity of mind, neither dis-
" turbing others, nor being disturbed at
" what passes among them."

Such is, with very little variation, the third question proposed in Mr Woolaston's delineation of the religion of nature. A question which he never answered, and though the editor of his delineation informs the world that Mr Woolaston had made some progress in collecting materials for this purpose, when an accident hastened his death: I profess myself convinced that the question never could have been answered, to the satisfaction of him, or any other rational enquirer, upon his principles.

In the investigation of this point it is necessary that we act as skeptics, and suffer

* Preface.

not ourselves to be led away by names and popular prejudices. But on the other side, liberal construction becomes us on this occasion, as men whose objects are realities, and not merely words and names. And let us avoid also the injudicious conduct of those who think that they cannot express due acknowledgments, for the divine manifestations: unless they “detract”^b from the “native brightness of the lamp of reason;” “which was also given by God, to enlighten every man that cometh into the world.”

Rational religion, as exhibited by systematic writers, conveys the idea of an abstruse science of speculation, rather than of the art of conducting life with prudence. It is termed philosophy by learned writers, and St Paul^c denominates it wisdom, and the wisdom of the world. But such an idea does not by any means come up to the notion of a system of rational religion; which, as calculated to serve to purposes of general use, and universal moral information, should rather be plain, simple, obvious and convincing, and employed to commu-

^b Squire, of the truth &c. of nat. and rev. religion, 12°. Sect. 30. p. 60.

^c 1 Cor. c. 2.

nicate

nicate enlarged, correct, and lively notions and impressions of the principles of common sense, of which the clown and the philosopher alike are partakers. For if rational religion be placed in an abstruse science, to be comprehended only by men of deep research; as the object of religion is to lead its professors, through the practice of duty, to the highest state of enjoyment, of which their nature is capable; and as no class of men, limit their wishes to mere existence, but all aspire after well-being: the lot of the lower classes, which include the majority, would be hard indeed, to be debarred of the advantages of religion, by their station in the useful and laborious scenes of life. Yet no vulgar capacity is sufficient, no small share of education and leisure is requisite for the comprehension of any philosophical system. In every such system the first point attempted to be settled, was the leading object of rational desire, the ruling principle of conduct. And it justly holds this place. For as religion is sought, to show the distinction^d of actions, into good, evil and indifferent; the judgment on which this distinction is founded, must be formed in the

^d Woolaston.

reason

reason of those whose actions are to follow this judgment: otherwise, if they cannot assign a reason for their conduct, their religion cannot be rational. In adjusting the leading object of desire, a large field of speculation opened on the mind. The different rank of importance in which those universal preconceptions*, those common sentiments of good, and implanted desires should stand, was a judgment to be formed, upon information. Of the appetites natural to the human species, some are animal, some rational: to make a just discrimination† between these, and give a due degree of countenance to each, were objects of discretion. In like manner, of moral good, where one office seemed to stand in the way of, and oppose another (and the acuteness of moral enquirers has furnished numberless questions of this kind) which was to be preferred? To settle these questions, the nature, the state of man in the scale of beings, his relations, his dependencies on superior and inferior orders, and also on other beings of his own species were points to be clearly investigated.

* Προληψεις

κοιναι
εμφυτοι } εννοιαι.
φυσικαι }

† Cic. de Off. L. I. §. 4.

Here

Here the immense field of speculation opened. First, of the author of human being, what is the divine nature, what his will, his dispensations what, and his designs with respect to man? Then of man in himself, and associated with his fellow creatures: his station with respect to himself, and his circumstances with respect to them, make his obligations vary indefinitely. Such are the vast regions of truth to be explored in fixing a rational sovereign good. It may be thought uncandid perhaps, as arguing from an abuse, to observe; that in every branch of this inquiry, the temptations to deviate into investigations of mere theory, are not to be resisted by men, devoted to philosophizing by long settled habits. However this be, upon this extensive plan*, this wide field of speculation, each system of philosophy is founded: and may truly be called an essay to ascertain the religion of man. But these systems are far too cumbersome for general use. The calls of business would not allow to every man leisure, the capacities of men would not qualify all, to go through those deductions of reason, from whence the principles of such a system were drawn. To these

* A mighty Maze, but not without a Plan.

Pope's Essay on Man, Line 6.

men

men therefore, they could not be the principles of rational conduct, because the reason of them was not level with their conceptions; but to be discovered only, by an investigation to which they were unequal: and because it is as impossible to understand with the reason of another man, as to see with his eyes. Thus, while philosophy was calculated (as the proficients asserted) only for the wise man in each school respectively, the laborious and industrious were excluded from participation in this exquisite art of forming human life. But the philosophers, thus raised to so enviable a preeminence, have amply revenged the public quarrel on themselves. For, in truth, great abstraction cannot have place in the conduct of common life; and could never enter, or long continue even with the theorist, when he applied himself to the management of his secular affairs. Hence it was, that in their intercourse with mankind the philosophers themselves were governed by the common rules of prudence, as other men; which (far different from abstract theory) whether engaged in conducting political or private concerns, was directed by the maxims of experience, and influenced by contingent circumstances, and occasional expediency.

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From

From the so different principles that governed men of speculation in public life, and the closet, it is amply accounted for. "That "practice"^b too often creeps where theory "can soar, and the philosopher proves as "weak as those whom he contemns." The philosophers indeed, in this respect, acted in the same manner precisely, as the cultivators of every other science. Each follows the train of thought, and uses the instruments (if there be any) adapted to his own philosophical purpose: but in the transaction of public or domestic business, conforms to the obvious rules of prudence, and to the common maxims of expediency. A science of speculation, such an intellectual system, so limited to men of great abstraction, and philosophic leisure, is not worthy of the appellation of natural or rational religion. Let it retain the title of philosophy, or assume the name of wisdom, the wisdom of the world: but let nothing pass for rational religion, that will admit of any other limitations, than those which mark the definition of the species. For this religion (as the name imports) in its obligations and its sanctions applies to every partaker of the faculty

^b Harris.

of

of reason; and therefore ought to render the principles, the foundation, the means, the advantages and end of religion, level to the understanding and capacity of the inquirer of every class and denomination. Were it not so, this absurdity would follow: the religious qualifications of men would not be moral, but natural and intellectual; and every man's rank, in this respect, would bear proportion to his natural abilities, to his education, and such extraneous causes, totally adventitious to him.

Another objection to rational religion, as exhibited by philosophy, arises from the uncertainty of it. The principles; nay even the sovereign principle and criterion of duty, are differently constructed by various philosophers; nor do any two agree exactly even in the most fundamental particular. The regions of truth are infinite, extending far beyond this visible system of the universe, as far as that eternal mind which made, directs, and governs the whole. Of truth, the object of human knowledge, the regions are indefinite; for wherever one thing can be affirmed of another, there is truth. In this wide field, the philosophic mind expatiating, unable from the unbounded extent, to comprise the whole, as a single object, in

one perception, fixes its attention, now upon one point of view, now on another: and particular truths, as different points in view, strike men differently, as their various taste and judgment, their fancy also and accidental inducements severally incline them. Hence truths are placed in a different rank of importance and distinction by men respectively, and their opinions, their principles, their characters vary, as their features. Thus, while each philosopher, with a freedom of investigation and inquiry, has judged for himself; and, governed by private reason, has placed the same truths in different lights, and different estimation; the systems they have framed have varied materially, so materially indeed, as to affect the whole form and foundation of religion, by constructing the ruling principle, and the standard of truth and virtue in a manner totally dissimilar. It was thus, that Epicurus on the one hand, taught his followers to pursue pleasure, and to cultivate the moral virtues in proportion to the degree in which they contributed to increase and prolong voluptuous gratification: while Zeno, on the contrary, placing the sovereign good in truth and virtue, taught his Stoic to reject and despise pleasure, as obnoxious to his purpose. Such

Such opposition in the principles of a science, and that not in principles which are immaterial, but in those which hold the first rank and are fundamental, must of necessity create great confusion amongst the cultivators of it, and perplex in the highest degree the candid and impartial inquirer. For were a man, not prepossessed in favour of any sect, to apply to philosophy for moral and prudential informations: such a one would not willingly pay implicit deference to any system; but would search for truth, wherever he could find it through them all. This man, as he read one well connected system, would find truths arranged in their respective degrees of distinction, as they bore relation, more or less remotely, to the leading principle of that philosophy. But from thence he would pass on to its rival system, urged not merely by curiosity, but by the desire of forming a judgment so material to the peace of his mind, as the choice of his religion, upon the fullest information. In this second delineation of moral truth, he would find the leading principle totally different, and truths and virtues regarded through a different medium: in short, no two things would appear so totally unlike as the rational religion of man, according to one, and ac-

cording to the other system. From hence, distraction and uncertainty must arise in the mind of the inquirer; the more increasing, the greater variety of systems he consulted: that must terminate at last in endless hesitation, skepticism, universal doubt, and irreligion; or be determined by a preference, arbitrarily given to one system, above all others, each in some respects equally deserving of it. Such difficulties attend the expectation of finding the rational religion of man in any of the intellectual systems, that ancient philosophy presented to the world. Nor will the more modern systems of ethics and morality answer better the description of true and complete religion. It is not to be questioned, but that it has been thought practicable, to construct a complete delineation of religion from the deductions of reason. The philosophic mind, in search of truth, applying one day to one branch of inquiry, the next to another, expands itself without confinement, and wherever it pushes its research, perceives the difficulties yield to investigation, and experiences no material obstructions to stop its career. Hence, accustomed to contemplate wisdom in its branches, and not perceiving any, that are essential, to lie out of its sphere; the mind is
apt

apt to presume, that it is as easy to comprehend the whole, as the parts in which it is contained: not duly weighing the immense magnitude of the object, far more indefinitely extended than reason itself. For considering truth in the variety and extent of its views, what life is equal to the contemplation of the several parts of an object, that has no ascertainable limits? Nay, even supposing that each might be viewed distinctly, in the days and hours of which human life consists, either by diligent investigation, or in the systems in which they lie scattered and dispersed: can the human capacity comprise, arrange, methodize and comprehend that unmeasurable system of moral truth? The labours of philosophy are nevertheless to be admired, and the liberal, the extensive, the refined judgment, displayed in ethic precepts, have done credit to the human understanding: but to suppose any system to exhibit a complete delineation of moral truth, would be to ascribe infinite comprehension to a finite mind, and presumptuously to arrogate a wisdom, the incommunicable attribute of the supreme Being.

Let no man therefore seek the perfection of natural religion in any intellectual system.
Philosophy

Philosophy or wisdom ; that is, the wisdom of the world is one thing ; but ethic prudence is another, and widely different. Obedience to the supreme Being, his maker, was an implanted sense in the mind of man, before natural or moral evil had any existence in the world. But when natural and moral evil gained admittance, then the distinction of good and evil arose in the mind, and the judgment of conscience was established, to continue, a common sense, for ever ; the test of human conduct, the lamp to guide man to the will of God, and assert the obligation to truth and virtue. (If on this subject, the moralist draws his intimations from the pages of sacred history, let it never be made an objection to him : for facts coëval with the earliest age of man are recorded no where else). In this moral prudence¹, consists the only true rational religion, a religion extended to every possible office, and to every moral agent universally. To this religion, accommodated, though it be, to all capacities, philosophy in none of its delineations, ever did justice ; a religion when united with the maxims of experience, could it fairly be transcribed, competent to

¹ Φρόνησις.

form

form an excellent moral character, and display an exquisite model of the perfect, fair and good, in practice. This alone has a title to the epithets of natural and rational religion: natural in a more obvious sense than the philosophical definition: inasmuch as it deduces its obligation from the implanted discrimination of right and wrong, of good and evil: and rational, as arising from the use of reason, and as existing in common in every partaker of the faculty. It is a religion that has an inward testimony of the approbation of the supreme Being to coincide with it; and an inextinguishable hope (for had no promise been given, assurance had been presumption) that the divine approbation would not be unattended with blessings and rewards. Here then we have unquestionably found a pure and holy religion, a religion conveying to its observer, of whatever class he be, an impression of his duty, and together with it, the present reward of consciousness; not without hope, that man's natural desire of immortality shall be gratified, and that in the future state, the consciousness of virtuous conduct shall remain, a source of eternal pleasure.

May we then close our inquiries here,
affured

assured that the great art ^k of life resides in this religion? That man in every station wherein he can be placed, cannot fail of finding here, whatever he can desire of direction in the arduous and the intricate; with comfort in the painful and laborious seasons of life? In short that this religion can assure him of peace of mind at all times?

But even in this case, some desiderata may be regretted in the form and nature of this religion, such as may occasionally defeat these beneficial purposes of it. In the first place, this law is not so fixed and precise as written laws are by their construction: and secondly, the state of even rational hope of future reward, without assurance, does not amount to perfect satisfaction.

With respect to the first, though this may not seem a very material objection, since man has within him a certain criterion of duty, a law, as Cicero ^l asserts of self preservation, “to which we are not trained, but formed:” yet a very different opinion is not unfounded. In the contemplation of national character, a considerable fluctuation appears in the notions and manners of men from time to

^k Nullum Numen abest, si sit Prudentia. Juvenal.

^l Pro Milo.

time :

time : which, though it does not commonly rise so high, as to obliterate any strong lines in the distinction of good and evil ; yet very commonly, in its changes, by the contagion of general practice, tends to relax the strictness of virtue ; and sometimes, to give the authority of custom and example to conduct highly unbecoming. Besides, when turbulent and libidinous affections exert their restless force, like boisterous winds in a stormy sea ; the voice of prudence and conscience, like the pilots art, avails but little against the raging elements. In both these cases no such clear guide is to be found in human prudence, as exists in written laws. For these can never fluctuate ; but however example may sophisticate, or passion impel, these constantly exhibit the same invariable test of obligation.

As to a future recompence of virtue ; without a divine promise no greater assurance indeed can be had, than rational hope founded on arguments drawn from the attributes of God. But then, though a full assurance were certainly to be wished, in a point so material as well to the virtue as happiness of mankind ; yet in default of this, the mind might well acquiesce in a hope founded on the best evidence of which the question was capable.

But

But alas ! far greater difficulties remain behind. Far more alarming considerations must occupy the mind of man, than doubts whether his virtue shall meet with a future recompense. The same divine justice which warrants his hope of reward, at the same time alarms his fears ; his fear lest transgression also should meet its just doom hereafter ; and lest divine vengeance, though not now inflicted in proportion to demerit, be only reserved to a future day of reckoning, when every offence shall be found accurately recorded, and receive its punishment in an exact retribution.

It was the fallacy of the tempter, we are told, when he seduced our first parents ; that, by transgression, their eyes should be opened, and they should be as Gods, knowing good and evil. What was here offered as a privilege, followed indeed as a consequence. They knew evil immediately, by experience, and by the contrast, perceived the value of that good from which they had swerved. The distinction of moral good and evil, whether at that time divinely impressed upon the human mind, or only then first perceived, by the experience of evil, was

^m Raro antecedentem scelestum
Deferuit Poena, Pede claudo. Horace.

certainly

certainly a gracious gift, and necessary to man in the state to which he was reduced. For, as the nature and will of G O D are unchangeable, the violations of moral truth, and the indulgence of impure affections, must be held by him in abomination, and render the criminal odious to him, and obnoxious to his severe displeasure. When man was therefore in a capacity to commit every enormity, but more especially if he became strongly inclined and prone to evil; it would have been inconsistent with the mercy and the justice of G O D, that he should incur the divine displeasure, and his own condemnation at the same time, without the consciousness of offence. And yet, unless the distinction of good and evil had existed in the human mind, to serve as a law to him, by what test could he have discerned the moral or immoral tendency of his conduct? Or by what power of divination could he have conceived, that those actions to which the propensities of his nature inclined him, were contrary to the will of his maker? Thus by the law of reason, arose the knowledge^a of sin: it was a law, implanted to serve as a check and caution against the in-

^a Rom. c. 4.

dulgence

indulgence of depraved appetites. This natural and rational religion, by no means, failed of giving to man full information of the beauty and desirable nature of virtue, as well as of the deformity of vicious conduct. But while conscience enforced this rule by a decisive judgment in favour of the one and against the other, a judgment which no influence or seduction could bend or suppress: man ever found himself strongly influenced by another law, which St. Paul^o has named the law in his members. This perverse inclination and propensity of the mind to evil, is a matter of fact, which is equally true or false according to the evidence of it; whether the manner in which evil was introduced can either be accounted for rationally or not: or whether it can or cannot be reconciled with the preconceptions which any one may have formed of divine providence, or the moral government of the supreme Being. This depravity is a truth amply attested by the sages^p of ancient times, and acknowledged in their writings. In this observation, philosophers perfectly agree with apostles. Thus, St Paul describes the state of man as truly desperate where he delivers

^o Rom. c. 8.

^p Plato. Apol. Soc. de Repub. L. VI. Phæd.

himself

himself in the character of a man led by the light of nature: “^a I delight in the law of God, after the inward man; but I see law in my members warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin that is in my members.” And Cicero^r in the terms of his description is not at all behind the apostle. “If nature,” says he, “had so framed us, that we could look into and perceive her, we might form our life under her as our best guide; nor have recourse to reason and the cultivation of it. But as it is, she has given us but little sparks of light, which we quickly extinguish by corrupt manners and depraved opinions, so that the light of nature is no where discernable.”—“Indeed whatever intimations men receive, whether from the suggestions of nurses in early age, the instructions of parents, the precepts of masters, the authority of books, and of general and popular opinions; all, all conspire to breed them up in error; so that truth is obliged to give place to vanity, and nature herself to prejudice.” Thus far the Roman philosopher. With the will of God,

^a Rom. c. 7.^r Tusc. Quæst. L. III. Præf.

with

with the suggestions of reason, with the dictates of natural conscience, the concupiscence of depraved nature, the false opinions and prejudices of the world, were not to be reconciled. And hence, as the concurring testimony of philosophers and inspired writers uniformly describe the case of infatuated man, the whole species whether taken collectively or individually, had all of them gone out of the way*: they had fallen universally into a depravity of manners and opinions, and were altogether become abominable: and also there were none that did good, either uniformly or generally, no not one.

The true and effectual religion of persons so circumstanced, is not sufficiently defined, as the religion of rational beings, unless their case, as sinners, be provided for. How then does the religion of reason apply to this case? How does it answer the exigencies of such persons?

For the sake of argument, let us suppose the case of a man unconscious of actual transgression. Even in this man (who however never existed) the emotions of his mind must frequently give him the experience of

* Psalm 14. Rom. c. 3

evil,

evil, together with the consciousness of offence arising from perverse inclinations. Sensibilities these, which must frequently invade his peace; at least, till he had fortified and secured his mind by virtuous habits. By what self delusion then; or, let it be persuasion, could even this man presume that he possessed the original integrity, and unconscious purity of mind, in which the author of his being at first created him, and designed him to subsist? Such assurance is not to be found in reason, nor can any thing but a divine act of grace confer it. But the case of actual transgressors is desperate. For since by the law of reason, enforced as it is by the awards of conscience, the Wrath^t of God is plainly declared, as if revealed from heaven, against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men; whose conduct soever amounted not to the purity and perfection, which the dictates of his mind required of him; that is, whosoever "held" the truth perceived and acknowledged by "him," in unrighteousness; this man was reserved under the curse of the law, and condemnation of his own mind, without rational resource, to the final vindication of

^t Rom. c. I. v. 18.

D

God's

God's justice, in the punishment of offenders.

Wretched state of man! From whence could he derive consolation, to sooth the anguish^a of his mind? Would repentance or contrition restore to him the serene conscience, and peace of innocence? "Go" to "any court of judicature and see whether the sorrow and concern expressed by the convict, will rescue him from the uplifted sword of civil justice." Can they then reverse the decrees of inviolable truth, and inflexible justice? If they can indeed, what is truth, what is justice? It is not in reason therefore to construct a religion for sinners. "For" the fear of punishment, branded on guilt by the Almighty, being both natural and rational, it is impossible that either nature or reason should afford any assistance, or sufficient remedy against this terror, unless indeed reason and nature be made up of contradictions."

To sum up the whole of this important argument. When we take a view of the state of man, under the guidance of reason;

^a I cannot see any rational expiation in sacrifices, and therefore cannot admit them as a resource.

^w Bp Sherlock's Disc. Vol. II.

^x Vol. II. Disc. 13. p. 2.

we

we find him bound to the performance of duties, suggested to him by moral prudence, and enforced by conscience. These suggestions form the only true religion of nature and reason, a religion not repositied in the writings of the wise; but divinely engraven upon the hearts of men. A religion indefinable, like the simplest natural ideas: to which philosophy and speculation added nothing, but rather perplexed and involved it: perplexed it with intricacies and refinements, whereby it was rendered unserviceable to the far greater part of mankind; and involved the plainest dictates in the uncertainty of various doctrines; thereby bewildering the inquirer in doubts, that had he consulted only the occasional suggestions of his mind, never had arisen. But to this religion, no man ever has paid a perfect obedience; yet reason, a pure moral sense, an emanation from the consummate truth, purity and perfection of the supreme Being; could apply no remedy for the deviations; but consigned the offender, without resource, a prey to the fears and remorse of conscience. And when, in the anguish of a depressed and perturbed spirit he implored pardon, reconciliation, hope, to restore serenity to his mind: when he anxiously inquired whether

D 2

there

there were no methods of expiation, no way to mercy, no door of hope for penitent sinners in the counsels of gracious heaven, no balm efficacious as that in Gilead to the repentant Israelite; his religion was silent and returned no answer.

From hence it appears that natural religion is not competent to answer to degenerate man the purposes of religion. That it can neither enable him to pass through life with peace of mind and the serenity of consciousness; nor at the close of it, to quit the scene, supported by the pleasing hope of a blessed immortality.

S E R-

S E R M O N III.

M A T T. XI. 28.

Come unto me, all ye that labour, and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

SUCH is the invitation of the divine author of the christian religion. When rational religion was not able to afford rest and satisfaction to the burthened mind; nor all the powers of the understanding, aided by all the refinements of the most exquisite cultivation: when wisdom, when philosophy had failed of constructing such a system as was applicable to the state of man, or answerable to his wants: the supreme Being himself condescended to the infirmities of his creatures, and gave them a new dispensation every way suited to the exigencies of their situation. The religion of reason is

D 3

truly

truly represented, as a pure and holy law, fixed as the throne of GOD, and immutable, like that truth, that justice, from whence it was transcribed. As such, it could neither bend to the weakness, nor accommodate itself to the wants of sinners; but exacted obedience, or the penalty of transgression, with the stern inflexibility of a lawgiver. In the deplorable state of man, *when this law, through transgression, had become a ministration of condemnation; divine mercy has effected what the Law could not do, in that it was weak, through the flesh. The gospel was sent from heaven, to be a remedy for sinners, an act of grace to prostrate convicts, a resource and consolation to the miserable and desperate. By this revelation our great Creator is represented, as a being, not indeed to be reconciled to sin; but of inexpressible compassion to the sinner. Here the burdened conscience finds an effectual atonement for transgression, a sacrifice and victim offered to the essential justice of the divine will; and here, accepted means of propitiation. Thus, the supreme assertor of truth is reconciled to offenders, and divine love and favour are restored to sinful creatures; thus

* Rom. c. 8. v. 3.

the

the burthen and oppreffion of guilt are removed, and the mind of man, now relieved, is gilded with an inward peace, enlivening as the confcioufnefs of virtue. Such is a juft eulogy of the christian covenant of redemption; which is ever represented in the facred writings, as an act of grace, and unmerited kindnefs to the human fpecies.

For when the ftate of ^b natural man is confidered, as the word of GOD and moral inquirers represent him; he appears wholly ^c given over to a reprobate and corrupted mind. ^d And the law in his members warring fuccefsfully againft the law of his mind holds him captive, a flave to corruptions that the inward man abhors, a wretched example of infatuation, and ^e monument of the fevere, but righteous judgment of GOD. Or (to exprefs the fame truths in the language of the natural man's confeffions) through defect of the juft fubjection of animal and fenfual appetite to the control of the moral powers, the reafon, and the underftanding; the bent of the human inclination, and his ruling paffion, are turned, greatly more than is fitting, to the gratification of the animal nature; while the rational defires are ne-

^b 1 Cor. c. 2. v. 14.
v. 26, 28. c. 7. v. 22.

^c Mente captus.
^e If. c. 29. v. 14.

^d Rom. c. 1.

glected,

glected, the sober dictates of the distinguishing faculties of man. Hence so great a degeneracy is produced, that were the desires to which man addict's himself, to be taken as the indications of what became him; they would exhibit a religion (if it can be so said without prostituting a sacred name) that would bear no resemblance, or conformity to reason, to purity, or to moral truth. Through this ascendancy of depraved appetite, man's understanding also is perverted, so as to be rendered incapable of entertaining moral sentiment, answerable to the excellence of genuine rational dictate; and moreover not less incapable of enforcing those precepts of reason effectually, which the mind clearly approves, by rational sanctions. For, by natural consequence, every moral delinquency, and much more, every habitual desertion of moral rectitude, 'disturb the soundness and integrity of the mind, and produce an infatuation, approaching much nearer in degree to insanity, than the word infatuation, in common use, expresses. This consequence the heathen writers attributed to a judicial sentence of the Gods: from whence the mimic poets borrowed the

¹ Cic. Orat. in Pif. §. 23.

tragic

tragic frenzy of Orestes, and the burning torches of the Furies. * Ifaiah also remarks this infatuation in that memorable passage, urged by our Lord, and by St Paul, more than once, against the unbelieving Jews: and his words would seem to confirm the notion of a judicial infatuation, ^bwere not this mode of speech usual in the old testament, and in jewish writings, where there appears to be no intention to express any judicial interposition of supernatural agency. Into such corruption and degeneracy, mankind had fallen; a state, which cannot be contrasted with the character suggested and prescribed by the law of reason, without setting apostate man in a light so far different from an object of the benignity of a God of truth; as to make him appear vile and abominable, in the sight of that pure and holy being. And moreover, by the captivity and infatuation of his mind, he was become incapable of turning himself from the perverse paths in which he trod, to cultivate a more perfect morality. In this forlorn condition, whatever was done for his redemption, must be effected without the

* If. c. 6. v. 9. Jo. c. 12, 39. and its paral. pass. Acts c. 28. v. 25. Rom. c. 11. v. 8.

^b Whitby on Rom. c. 11. v. 8.

cooperation

cooperation of infatuated man: and thus abandoned, there was no way, in reason, open to him to recover the divine favour, or escape the vengeance of divine justice. Wherefore, the redemption of man is to be attributed solely to the immeasurable liberality of the best and greatest of beings, and to be acknowledged with all gratitude, a most seasonable act of free grace, of undeserved mercy. The gospel therefore is the religion of Sinners. ¹It is adapted to relieve the burthened and heavy laden; ²to bind up those that are broken in heart, and give them medicine to heal their sickness.

Such the necessities of man, so absolutely gracious the christian dispensation. But the gospel is a subject far exceeding the comprehension of any created being, a mystery, ¹which even angels desire to look into. And so great is "^mthe depth of the riches of the goodness of GOD; that his doings are unsearchable, and his ways past finding out." As to man, a creature, in his utmost natural proficiency, removed at an infinite distance from the knowledge of the righteousness of GOD: he can know no more of the dispensations and the divine

¹ Matt. c. 22. v. 11. c. 9. v. 10.

² Pf. 147. v. 3.

¹ 1 Pet. c. 1. v. 12.

^m Rom. c. 11. v. 33.

economy

economy than is revealed: and even of that portion, the perception must be such alone as he can derive immediately from the sacred oracles themselves. Yet, if accompanied with an entire deference of judgment to the divine word, the contemplation of this stupendous instance of God's providence over the moral world, will serve to many useful purposes; the subject being adapted to elevate and improve the mind of man, and to give him proper sentiments of himself and of the supreme Being.

Though the christian religion was so entirely an act of grace; and though the Son of God freely offered himself, an atonement for transgression; yet the redemption was not applied indiscriminately to all; but a faith, descriptive of those sentiments, which are necessary qualifications for persons circumstanced as believers are, "was demanded, as requisite to the divine acceptance. When this is considered, the infatuation which appears so universally to have pervaded the species, at the time when the gospel was delivered, may render the numerous conversions to the pure faith in Christ hardly to be accounted for, without embra-

^a Matt. c. 20. v. 16.

cing

cing the opinion of the fatalists, which attributes them to a supernatural overbearing influence. But, without lessening the impression of the power of GOD so graciously exerted for the redemption of mankind; there is the clearest testimony, in the writings of heathen moralists, to prove, that though the depravity of the human mind shed so baneful an influence on his manners; it did not take from him the consciousness that those manners were not such as became a rational agent: and though the infatuation was so great as to occasion him continually to °choose bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter; it did not proceed so far, as to satisfy him, that so absurd a choice was either just in reason, or conducive to his happiness. Herein the gospel was adapted to the state of man. The obedience of faith is an obedience to prescription, which conveys a far different idea, from perfect rectitude of moral sentiment. Our Lord did not lay down a complete system of ethic precept, and demand a conformity to it in sentiment and manners, as the conditional qualification for his favour. This must have been demanded in vain of man constituted as he is. Instead

° II. c. 5. v. 20.

of

of this, the requisites to admittance into the christian covenant, were such as man had full powers to exhibit: a sense of his wants and infirmity, a desire to recover a better state, and a tractable temper, to obey the plastic hand of his new master. As the gospel ordained such terms of acceptance it was truly a religion, and the duty required was strictly moral. It was the same indeed, as had ever been acknowledged, by the name of obedience, passive obedience, to be a becoming expression of piety under natural evils; from the consideration of an overruling providence. But the christian revelation did not stop here, it did not abandon the believer, when initiated, to follow the same perverse conduct, which marked his unregenerate character: but vindicated the essential purity of the divine will, by forming a discipline for the improvement of the accepted servants, that should produce no mean accomplishment of character, in principle and virtuous conduct.

But whoever shall consider the gospel only as a religion, will form a very inadequate idea of this grace of GOD. The redeemer of mankind is set forth in two points of view by the prophet ^p Isaiah in a passage cited by ^a St

^p If. c. 49. v. 6.

^a Acts c. 13. v. 47.

Paul:

Paul: "It is a light thing," (says the Almighty of him) "that thou shouldest be
" my servant, to raise up the tribes of Jacob,
" and to restore the preserved of Israel. I
" will also give thee for a light to the gen-
" tiles, that thou shouldest be my salvation
" to the end of the earth." In this last mentioned character, as the restorer of man to the favour of his maker, and to the rational hope of acceptance by that supreme arbiter of human conduct, and human destiny; he left his father's throne: and laying aside the refulgence of the divine image, took upon him the human form, and therein expiated, by a vicarious suffering, the guilt of sin, and made an effectual atonement for transgression: of this mercy, unregenerate man is the object, who is made partaker of it, when he is taken into covenant with GOD. In the other character, 'as a light of the world, he is considered as a prophet and a lawgiver; and the objects of this ministry are men already taken into covenant: men, who are, by profession, hearers of his word; and who are put under the discipline of the gospel, to learn in what manner to conduct themselves, so as to please the supreme Being.

^r If. c. 8. v. 12. Pl. 112. v. 9, 105.

When

When the gospel is considered as a doctrine revealed for the instruction of the believer, after his initiation; this circumstance will appear in it, as in rational religion. Its precepts are not delivered in a system. For though revealed religion must of necessity be exhibited in writing to all, who live at a distance of time and place from those, wherein the revelation was made; yet by none of the inspired writers, is the christian religion delivered in a regular formulary; but left in detached precepts, occasional prescriptions, and determinations of moral cases; and moreover, its principles, for the most part, are taught in parables. And as the philosophers who have attempted to exhibit rational dictate in a system, have never done justice to a religion that had real pretensions to a descent from consummate intelligence; so (I speak under correction) christian religion has never received an adequate representation, where an attempt has been made to comprehend its principles in a systematical delineation. As it comes, under its own peculiar form, it is attended with singular advantages. The christian is obliged hereby to be more versed in the sacred books; while it is from such converse, and not any occasional reference, that he can discern the will

will of GOD, in cases which he may wish to refer to it. Under the same idea, the gospel is calculated to try the disposition of the professor; because (as it does not abound in cases of casuistry) it leaves him, for the most part, under the guidance of his own discretion; though that discretion be still regulated by the principles and general tenor of the christian doctrine. Of course, his conduct becomes the test, as it is the fruit of his faith; and thus, at his own infinite hazard, he receives the doctrines of GOD with partial submission, and abides by the consequences of subduing, whether partially or entirely, his own prejudices, to the obedience of faith. Thus also, every stage of the christian pilgrimage through life, becomes a state of discipline, and a stage of improvement; while the conviction, the practical assent, the resources of christianity open gradually upon his mind; and remove, by degrees that bear proportion to his improvement, the blindness of the natural man (as St Paul expresses himself) or the infatuation and weakness of the animal dictates, and faculty of understanding (as a heathen moralist would express the same idea). Upon the whole, the scriptures are sufficiently instructive; and as they inform the understanding

standing of the faithful, supersede the use of a system, by restoring him, as it were, to that original rectitude of disposition; when, without the distinction of good and evil, without any law of works and righteousness, his ways were upright, his judgment sound, and manners pleasing to his maker.

Does the gospel then, in prescribing the obedience of faith, seek to lay mankind under a yoke of superstition? It is rather to be embraced as a gracious scheme calculated to vindicate the rights of man to sound judgment, and assert his claim to free sentiment: inasmuch as it removes all those impediments, by which the understanding was obstructed, and the most desirable objects of human knowledge were involved in clouds and thick darkness.

But in order that a true notion of the gospel, as a religion be entertained, let these opposite impressions be corrected with equal care. On the one side, let it not be supposed that it removes the obligations to attend to the moral intimations of prudence, either as if it established a new and more extended system of ordinance, or made void the ordinances of reason, in compassion to the infirmity of man. On the other side let not the

E idea

idea of it as the mere restoration of natural religion be admitted, except it be with the most precise limitation. For under this idea it forms a pretence, to the curious skeptical christian for receiving the gospel incompletely; with avowed exception to every doctrine that he cannot reconcile with his prepossessions.

Let not then the religion of Christ be supposed to require a more perfect righteousness than the genuine religion of right reason. But that we fall not into error, right reason must be understood abstractedly, as equivalent to moral truth cognizable by man. Had the gospel laid additional burthens on man, instead of a covenant of mercy, it had been a rigorous law indeed, a sentence of inevitable wrath and condemnation. For as the religion of moral and rational dictate formed a rule so pure and perfect in its nature, that man could never follow it exactly; to what use could an extended moral obligation serve to such a creature, but to consign him to wrath without remedy, to plunge him deeper in transgression, and ascertain his condemnation? But in truth, as the line of moral dictate is commensurate to the rational and moral powers of the agent, had the christian lawgiver extended it, these powers of comprehension

prehenſion alſo muſt have been enlarged. But had he done this, or in any reſpect altered the representations of original natural dictate, it would ſeem as if the great Creator had made men, at firſt, beings incompetent to the purpoſes of religion, the end of their exiſtence; and afterwards ſeeing the defect, like ſome human artiſt, had corrected and ſupplied it by a ſecond effort. A ſuppoſition that derogates from the wiſdom of the ſupreme artifice.

But if it were not the divine purpoſe to introduce a more perfect ſyſtem, much leſs could the intention be, to cancel the obligation to morality; or ſuperſede that religion, which has its foundation in the unchangeable will of GOD. For thoſe deviations from moral truth, which at any time were diſpleaſing to the deity, could at no time ceaſe to be ſo, or alter their moral name and nature. In truth, that religion which aroſe out of the implanted diſtinction of good and evil, muſt ever retain its influence with man, while common ſenſe remains, and that diſtinction continues. It muſt retain its influence, while native judgment, while natural conſcience, repreſent the good an object of deſire, of purſuit, of admiration; the evil, in its nature, vile, pernicious and deteſtable.

No extraordinary interposition of revelation can be supposed to set aside a religion founded in the nature of things, however it may assist the moral agent in the performance of his duties ; or publish an act of grace, and confer pardon, on offenders.

In opposition to these notions, let the religion of Christ be considered as a new revelation, indeed, of the will of GOD ; but of that same invariable will, from whence every genuine dictate of nature, and every original intimation of right reason are equally transcribed. And let the dispensation be esteemed as adapted to renew the advantages of religion to mankind ; and give a clear light to their paths, who had deviated widely in sentiment and manners from truth and rectitude. That the dispensation might answer these purposes, Christ has restored the principles of reason in points where they had been perverted. The law of 'Forbearance is an example of this, as it is opposed to the ancient law of retaliation. He has indicated what is becoming and truly moral, more accurately than it had been stated by ethic writers. Thus in the place of the principle of justice ; the christian lawgiver¹ sub-

¹ Matt. c. 5. v. 33.

¹ Matt. c. 5. v. 43.

stitutes

stitutes the principle of charity, as a more social principle, more becoming to man, more pleasing to his maker. He has pointed out the line of truth, and exalted virtue, where it was ill understood before. Thus, in the instance of the good Samaritan, our master has cancelled the vulgar limits of philanthropy, and made the objects of the social obligations as numerous as the human species. He has inculcated the fundamental principles of morality by positive precept, thereby producing a written and unvarying test of the actions of men; a test, which no alterations of times, no fluctuation of manners and opinions, no circumstances whatever can sophisticate or elude. But what is more: he has settled a ruling passion, that shall correspond with religion in every application, and unite the most powerful inducements of desire, with the suggestions of moral prudence. Such is the precept of our divine instructor to expect the chief happiness of man in the world to come; and seek, in the first place, to obtain an inheritance in the future kingdom of the Messiah. Lastly: he has enforced the obligations of religion by additional and prevailing sanctions. Nor let

^u Luke c. 10. v. 36. ^w Matt. c. 27. v. 37, 39. ^x Matt. c. 6. v. 19.

it be doubted, whether the epithet of additional sanctions be not applied to the life and immortality promised in the gospel; with equal justice as that of prevailing sanctions. Unquestionably, these doctrines receive fresh light from the gospel. The hopes of men are confirmed by the inviolable word and promise of God: so that though life and immortality were ever so much the dictates of natural desire, and the probable intimations of reason; still eternal life, and a glorious immortality as annexed to virtue by the word of God, are sanctions to religion peculiar to the gospel.

So much aid given to the cultivation and practice of the most refined morality, may seem to justify the notion of those, who call our religion the restoration of natural religion. It is indeed so; inasmuch as it delivers precepts of moral truth, in an excellent strain of purity and energy: and, when so embraced by faith, rather than apprehended, (at least in any vulgar stage of proficiency) enforces them with more than rational sanctions. But, in this expression, natural religion is an equivocal term, and requires a definition. Whenever it is said that christianity is the restoration of natural religion, nothing more can justly be meant by the expression:

expression: than that, ^y when the genuine dictates of nature had been extinguished or perverted, by corrupt lives and depraved opinions; the gospel has given precepts, whereby ^z what is good and evil in the actions of man, agreeably to the state in which he finds himself, may be accurately distinguished. But still, in no sense can the gospel be termed the same as natural religion. For how is the assertion to be proved? Where is that model to be found of natural religion, by comparison of which with the religion of Christ, this affirmation may be established? Is natural religion to be found in any of the systems that philosophy has framed? Christianity is greatly above them; correcting their misconceptions, and expressing a more chaste, more refined, more exquisite morality, than they do. Has natural religion, (as ^a Cicero has defined it) its foundation in appetite; and is it distinct from the dictates of reason and learning? As the appetites now exist in man, their dictates are found equally opposite to the precepts of the christian and every other national and pure religion: does natural religion then reside in that perfect mind, that accomplished rea-

^y Cicero. ^z Woolaston. ^a Tusc. Quæst. L. III. Præf. son,

son, that truth, on all sides, separate from error? How can christianity be compared with so abstract an idea, an existence conceived, tho inaccurately; but never comprehended by any finite mind, or mind incorporated in matter? Or is natural religion, the dictate of that ideal mind, by which the human nature was informed in its primeval state, 'ere sin defaced the image? The christian religion is widely different, it is the religion of sinners, it is formed on a knowledge and experience of evil, which at that time had no place in the mind of man. What then? Is this religion a transcript from absolute and consummate truth itself? From that truth which exists not, but in the divine mind, which alone is perfect, and which alone it describes? If this be the definition of natural religion: it is granted that the christian religion, is indeed a ^b revelation of the mind of G O D; of that mind which is invariably the same for ever, constant, uniform, and immutable. But if the gospel be justly named the restoration of natural religion only in this respect, the argument of its internal evidence vanishes entirely, as a proof of the divine authority of the christian

^b 1 Cor. c. 2. v. 16.

revelation

revelation, to infidels, or skeptics. For, as these and every natural man, are °incapable of receiving the things of the spirit of God, what would such an application be, but to bring a revelation of the mind of God to the bar of human judgment, for its trial? The argument has been thus stated^d: “the “gospel is credible, because agreeable to “those notions which men naturally have, “of God, and of themselves.” But can the economy of the divine dispensations be justly brought to this test? Are not these things of God °mysterious as that supreme and perfect mind, which lies far beyond the reach of human comprehension? With respect to the moral precepts indeed, which christianity inculcates, human judgment will go farther; and it may be justly said of these, that they agree, to the fullest amount of the uninfluenced dictates of the understanding, with the most general preconceptions of the perfect, fair, and good, as far as the mind is capable of ideas so abstracted. But this coincidence will not justify the argument. For although no proof of it will be required by any proficient, or faithful disciple: yet, before infidels, when it is

° 1 Cor. c. 2. v. 14.

° 1 Cor. c. 2. v. 9.

^d Bradford. Boyle's Lect.

brought

brought to prove any thing, the agreement will not so readily be allowed. And when the controversy is put upon this issue will it not be said? If it be a good argument for receiving the christian religion, that it is approved by right reason: suppose it could not be reconciled with right reason; would not that be sufficient ground for rejecting it? And if one side of the proposition be urged as conclusive, how can the other consistently be rejected? Right reason then becomes the arbitrator between the supreme Being delivering his will, and his creatures; whether they shall pay any obedience, or not, to his injunctions. But right reason is an equivocal term also. My opinion is to me (without which indeed it would not be mine) what another man's is to him, and each man's to himself, with inconceivable variety: right reason. For as no man can see with the eye sight, so neither can any man understand with the reason, or the faculties of another. As therefore no common standard can be found, to which all men will subscribe; every man's reason is to him, right reason: and according to this argument, submission to the word of God is irrational, nor is any man obliged to receive it, where his reason does not clearly approve and comprehend it.

If

If so, not the word of God, but every man's reason is to him the rule of his faith; and then, by consequence, Manes, Arius, or any other Heretic, is as good a christian, and as much in the faith, as Chrysostom or any of the champions of orthodoxy; and this, though it be allowed, at the same time, that the profession of one man is agreeable to the word of God, and that of the other not so. Nay, the very same argument that justifies the opinion of every man, may be pleaded also as conclusive in vindication of his principles and manners, and this even to the conduct of the vilest profligate. But if the general preconceptions be admitted, as the standard of right reason, to which every man must subscribe that would not be branded as absurd; yet the number of these is by far too small to serve as the test of any moral system: But were they ever so numerous, even the principles of common sense are human conceptions; and when the ravages made in the powers of men, by their deviations from truth be considered, it cannot appear unreasonable that God should refuse to 'submit his manifestations to be tried by a test so inadequate. I conclude therefore

¹ 1 Cor. c. 2. v. 11.

that

that the argument of internal evidence can only be applied with good effect, by the proficient in christian knowledge, for the satisfaction of his own mind, and the assurance of his own faith; while he alone is possessed of the whole^a of it, having a true conception of the christian principles, on the one side; and on the other, ^b the most correct judgment in natural and moral principles. But to infidels and skeptics; and also to novices, it is proposed to little purpose. They are liable to misconceptions on either hand^c: and moreover should they take up the argument negatively themselves; it would recoil, with a force hardly to be resisted, like elephants in battle, on the party that first employed it.

To conclude: had the Saviour of the world, only added to his character of a redeemer by expiation, the office of a prophet to teach the will of GOD; much had still been wanting, to render the dispensation effectual to his gracious purpose. In the character of a ^d high priest, taken from among men, he became experienced in human infirmities; and being touched with such sympathetic feeling, he has constructed effectual

^a 1 Cor. c. 2. v. 16.
c. 2.

^b 1 Cor. c. 2. v. 15.
^c Heb. c. 5. v. 2.

^d 1 Cor.

methods

methods of sanctification: appointing means to draw down divine aid and spiritual succour, to renew to offenders the peace of consciousness, and the upright mind of integrity. Finally, as an accepted satisfaction, he has annexed to his gracious covenant, privileges equal to all that religion can bestow. Acceptance with GOD producing peace of mind in this life, and to be followed by an eternal inheritance hereafter.

In this peace the christian spends his days, deriving consolation in every fortune, and at the close of life: or rather exulting in confident hope that in the future kingdom of his Lord, he shall find eternal mansions of rest, and peace, and bliss.

S E R M O N I V.

L U K E XIV. 33.

*Whoſoever he be of you that forſaketh not all
that he hath, he cannot be my Diſciple.*

AFTER having taken a general view of the goſpel, let us now approach nearer, and contemplate the ſtupendous ſcheme of redemption more cloſely; if peradventure we may graſp within our comprehension, a part of the immense ſtructure.

Though the ſon of G O D, in condeſcenſion to human infirmities, left his throne of glory to redeem mankind; and though the human ſpecies was not capable of doing any thing effectual to its own ſalvation: yet thoſe ſentiments are demanded, as qualifications, by the founder of our faith; which are requiſite to give a due eſtimation of the divine mercy,

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as well as to produce that acquiescence of mind and judgment, without which no man can follow a prescribed rule, or embrace a doctrine delivered to him.

When the human species through the induced, not natural weakness of its moral powers, and an infatuation of understanding, was become incapable of obtaining, by the aid of natural religion, the objects of religion: nay more, when natural religion itself, through the multiplied offences, into which mankind had fallen, had * become a law of condemnation universally: in this deplorable state of man, the divine mercy, in the gospel, revealed a gracious dispensation of redemption. A dispensation, in which the greatest compassion to the species is manifested, on the one hand; and on the other, the most jealous attention to the vindication of consummate truth and purity. But of the doctrines set forth in this divine manifestation, the limited and low conceptions, that man can frame of perfect moral qualities, will ever render human notions unworthy: unworthy of the dignity of the subject; though they may at the same time be such, as shall do the highest credit to himself, and reflect

* Pf. 14. v. 1, 2, 3. Rom. c. 3. v. 9.

a lustre

a lustre on his individual capacity. For in no science are the gradations of improvement so various and discernible, as in this of ethics: where the conceptions that men form of the subjects it contains, improve in equal proportion to the refinement and exact discernment they have attained. This position may be illustrated, from what is very observable in the judgments of taste. In musick, for example, the vulgar ear is charmed with harmonious sounds, and disgusted by any gross dissonance, or any greatly discordant period. But the vulgar ear is alike insensible to those delicate agreements, or those more minute inaccuracies in composition, which respectively delight or shock the master, and critics of real taste. So it is in morals: the distinction of right and wrong, of good and evil, is impressed upon the most vulgar minds; but the conceptions of moral qualities, as of justice, fortitude, temperance and prudence; and still more, of the more general ideas of the true, the becoming and the useful, admit of indefinite refinements, according to the cultivated discernment, and the improved discretion of the moralist. From hence it arises, that of moral precepts also, wherever they are found, whether in christian doctrine, or rational dictate, men form

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conceptions more or less just and accurate, according to their moral taste. But this taste, is not produced, like refinements in speculative science, by elaborate disquisition; in any degree so certainly, as it is by virtuous conduct, and the cultivation of religious character. In this respect, the moralist, and the practitioners of the fine arts are circumstanced alike. The theory may be cultivated very diligently, and yet not seconded by a proportionable execution: but it is from practice, constant practice alone, according to the best rules, that the skill, the delicacy of expression are to be attained, which distinguish the execution of the accomplished artist. So also in ethics: the science may be cultivated in theory, without producing any excellent maxims, or laudable accomplishments; it is from exercise alone that those respectable examples of virtuous conduct, from experience that those admirable maxims have been formed, that do real honour to the science.

In the gracious scheme of redemption, divine compassion has found an atonement for transgression, divine compassion has applied a remedy to the deep wounds made by former deviations, and ^b broken the rod of

^b If. c. 9. v. 4.

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the oppressor, under which, in the hand of conscience man continually smarted. But mercy and truth are equally attributes that coincide in the divine will; and they must of necessity meet also, and unite in every dispensation that flows from thence. That a creature, though an offender, should be an object of the compassion of his creator, is entirely consistent with every idea of the divine goodness: that the punishment and death even of the sinner, should grieve (to speak humanly) the universal father, excites no astonishment: that the judge of all the earth should^c temper justice with equity, and make every allowance, that the most candid construction of the case would admit, appears right, and agreeable to every moral attribute. But, that divine vengeance should cease to pursue the transgressor, that G O D should be reconciled to the offender, even when he was become so degenerate as to have depraved his moral sense; herein consists the mystery of divine compassion, a mystery not explicable by any natural genius, any moral light, or refinement within the reach of human penetration. Yet still, the essential purity of the divine nature, a purity

^c Bp Sherlock, Vol. III. Disc. 8.

never to be reconciled to offence, in whatever light the offender stand allied, requires the sanctification of the objects of divine mercy and acceptance; ^dthat they should be redeemed from all iniquity, and so purified as to become a peculiar people unto God, zealous of good works.

But upon contrasting the state of ^enatural man with such a state of becoming sentiment; much will appear requisite to be done, 'ere this apostate can be rendered a fit object of the final acceptance of his maker.

When God made man, at the beginning, and designed him to be a rational and a moral creature; besides the appetites with which he furnished him in common with the brute species, he endowed him with the faculties of the understanding, that he might form the principles of his knowledge and conduct, by his judgment and discretion.

If the great creator did so impress any ideas on the human mind, as that such ideas should become innate, these would be prepossessions; which, being derived from that supreme and perfect mind, must be agreeable to truth and rectitude: and this conclusion would follow, that the natural prepossessions

^d Tit. c. 2.

^e 1 Cor. c. 2.

of

of man, were to truth and rectitude. But it is much to be questioned whether there be any such innate impressions. Still however if not, and if the mind be at first totally uninformed, and a mere *rasa tabula*; yet, without question, there is in every rational mind, an ^g accommodation to truth, with an aptitude to embrace it where it appears, an admiration of it, and inherent desire to seek after, and discover it. From this love of truth it is, that the infant no sooner opens his eyes, than, from every object of perception, he collects simple apprehensions; and that, even before, by the acquisition of the faculty of speech, he can describe to others, the impressions, which these perceptions have made upon his mind.

Nor is the interval long, before, in obedience to these impressions, he embraces those ^h first principles, the principles of common sense; which, as they are scarcely removed from perception, are no more to be controverted, than the simplest apprehensions. Hitherto there is but little room for the exercise of the judgment or discretion, the mind being accommodated, in such a manner, as to take its direction, as it were,

^f Locke.^g Cic. de Offic.^h Locke.

necessarily. So truly admirable are the dispensations of our great and good Creator! Who has proportioned the moral task of man to his growing capacity, directing him by an influence almost irresistible in his first conceptions; which are, and must be collected, long before his judgment could assist him in making any discriminations. Hitherto likewise of course all men think alike, and these principles are justly denominated of common sense; though they widely differ from the *προληψεις* of the philosophers, which are far more abstracted from perception, than these first notions, the only universal principles and elements of knowledge. But at the principles of common sense no man ever stopped, not even one of those whose lot in life confines them to daily labour, and whose minds, for want of use and education, are incapable, not of any abstractions only; but even of drawing a train of conclusions in detail, from obvious principles. Peculiar maxims of prudence, principles for the conduct of life, and a ruling passion; with various other notions and informations, are collected by all men (framed by combining the original notices) from the conclusions which strike each mind respectively, either in the progress or result of its disquisitions.

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In this important exercise of discretion, though the first principles on which it is conducted be so universal; yet the conclusions are not uniform, but the ruling passions of men, their characters, their maxims of prudence, and also their notions and opinions, vary as much as their features and complexions.

Of every exercise of the understanding, truth is the object; in which assertion moral and prudential as well as philosophical and speculative disquisitions are included: for virtue and truth are so allied, that what in speculation is truth, is virtue in practice. Were the mind perfect in its operations, it would embrace nothing but truth, in all its disquisitions; those the most abstract, as well as the most obvious. And though the regions of cognizable truth be indefinitely extended, far beyond the comprehension of a finite mind; yet whatever information struck upon the perfect understanding, it would be received with the just distinction it deserved. Wherefore, as truth is uniform, that observable difference of opinion and character, by which the same position is erroneous upon one system, which is a principle of truth in another, must arise from partial consideration, and defects in the operations of the mind.

mind. From these defects it proceeds, that truth and virtue in an abstract sense, on the one side; and the opinions and prudential characters of men on the other; agree, by no means, in every feature, or perfectly in any. The origin of false notion and moral evil, or (allow me the expression) of speculative and practical error, can never be satisfactorily accounted for in reason; because it argues a degeneracy in the moral powers, and the faculty of understanding; which cannot be supposed originally incompetent to the perception of truth, or the attainment of knowledge; since truth and knowledge are its natural objects. That such a depravity exists in fact, the observation of writers of all ages, the examples recorded in history, amply testify. The sacred page alone, in which the fall of man is recorded, and the consequences of that original transgression, affords a satisfactory account, how man has become a slave to sensual appetites, and of course gross and perverse in his opinions. For using this account as a clew, no difficulty will arise from supposing the mind of man as little perfect in the investigation of spe-

¹ *Ætas Parentum pejor avis, tulit
Nos nequiores, mox daturos
Progeniem vitiosiore.*

culative

culative and practical truth as we find it in fact. For truth is simple and untainted, it needs only the single eye, the sound mind, to apprehend it: it wants not any tedious ambages to explain it, but, on the contrary, strikes with a native splendor. Yet the eye must be open to receive it: and whatever prepossessions are there, will bar the perception. For they will act as a bias and influence on the understanding; and wherever bias be, deliberation is not equal, but the mind, deprived of the aid of its judgment, is necessitated to an opinion; unless the force of truth be greater than the bias on the mind. Thus the evil eye is blinded, and led captive. There is a chaste veil, that screens true wisdom from unhallowed sight; and the evil eye seeks after her in vain, involved in the darkness of error, and bewildered in its own perversions. And thus it comes to pass, that the mind of man, now depraved, is incapable of that exquisite discernment, or the simplicity of judgment, by which alone it could explore absolute and perfect truths; or even embrace them if by any means, delivered in such perfection. To clear the human perception, it is requisite

* Euripides. Cic. Off. L. I. §. 4. Matt. c. 6. v. 22.]

therefore

therefore that the perversions of judgment be corrected; and in order that man may be patient of such correction, he must have a due sense of these perversions; how incomplete his notions, how imperfect his principles are: in short how weak, how defective his reasoning, his moral powers. For if a philosopher take a disciple, who has adopted a false taste, or false notions; unless he can first make him sensible of the wrong impression he has received, all the precepts of true science will be thrown away upon him: in like manner, if the disciple of Christ be not first sensible of the perverseness of his manners and opinions; he will find it impossible to embrace the purchased redemption with becoming gratitude; or to conform himself to the means appointed for his sanctification. From hence the necessity of repentance and mortification appears; the necessity, that he who would receive the gospel, should put off (in the language of St Paul¹) and crucify the old man, before the work of regeneration can have a beginning.

But the same contrast, which has rendered the necessity of repentance, of the mortification and denial of former sentiment so

¹ Gal. c. 5. v. 24.

apparent,

apparent, may possibly seem to represent the duty as absolute in its nature; more absolute, than in fact, would be practicable.

Had the gospel been a complete system of perfect truth, and were it required, in the idea of christian faith, that the understanding should, at once receive it completely; the mind's eye must previously be rendered absolutely single, and the dispensation would exact, under the idea of repentance, of man, so infirmly constituted as man is, the renunciation, in one act, of every opinion, beyond the simplest apprehensions of common sense. But how had this been possible? To renounce the honest and necessary arts of the world: those arts of industry, which conduce so manifestly to the enjoyment of life; those liberal arts, the refined exercise of which distinguish an accomplished people; those arts of government, which are so necessary in modes of civil policy, formed on models not of abstract but of human wisdom, is a hard and mortifying task indeed. But it is necessary upon this supposition; for these arts of the world are not attained without diligent application, or practised without constant assiduity: whereby the mind is secularized and dissipated; and the thoughts turned into various channels, which should
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be applied intensely to this one object, were a system of perfect truth to be received. And yet, were these arts of the world to be renounced, it would derange entirely, and throw into confusion the whole course of things below. Besides, could man forego every favourite idea, the innocent offspring of the mind, the darling child of fancy, the production of imagined penetration? To cut off a hand and pluck out an eye, are operations far, far easier, than thus to reduce the mind once furnished, again to its uninformed state. Had this been expected of mankind, by mere man it never could have been performed; nor could any thing, short of an absolute controlling influence, have effected so entire a change. But the discipline of the gospel may subsist effectually without so absolute a self denial. This gracious dispensation takes men, infirm creatures, as it finds them: and, as they are such, does not require of them a perfect mind either in sentiment or manners, at any period. A ^m zeal for truth and virtue is widely different from the possession; nor does this disqualify men, except in some peculiar circumstances, from cultivating the

^m Tit. c. 2.

innocent

innocent and refined arts; or render it less their duty to adorn their holy profession with the honourable and useful arts of this life. The limits set to the pursuit of these truly valuable objects (and the pursuit is certainly limited) are ever varying with the state of the profession of the gospel. When GOD called the patriarch Abraham; "he took him away from his country and his kindred, that he might spend his days entirely under divine direction, and fulfil, under the guidance of heaven the mysterious purposes of providence. Throughout this patriarch's life, a continual manifestation was interposed for his protection, and amply to supply the uses of worldly connexions and political laws. In such circumstances, his abstraction from the world, became as it were entire. Happy, thrice happy patriarch, so peculiarly the friend of GOD! Nor was the case of those widely different, to whom the promulgation of the gospel was at first committed. Enjoined to be attentive only to the propagation of the christian faith, divine protection was extended to them, in the most unquestionable interpositions; to supply the want to them also, of those secular relations and

^a Acts. c. 7. v. 3.

attentions,

attentions, from which by the precept of their master, and the functions of their sacred office, they also, were secluded and removed. And yet even to these, prudence, and the ° wisdom of serpents were recommended by our Lord; and indeed became them in their situations: whether they were called to guide and rule the church, or to conduct themselves amidst unbelievers and persecutors. Since the times of the apostles, the condition of the church has varied repeatedly; and of course, the obligations of christians in this respect, have varied likewise; and yet, though this precept of our lord appears so plainly an absolute law, to those only who are placed in particular circumstances; nevertheless it has been interpreted as if conclusive universally. But let ^p Simeon, or any other fanatic, stand upon his pillar; and if no miracle be interposed to satisfy his hunger, let him submit himself, as others, “^q to labour” in some honest vocation, that he may render himself useful to the community, and “have to give to him that needeth.”

Yet: though an abatement be made, from those absolute interpretations of the precept

° Matt. c. 10. v. 16.

^p Stilites. Mosheim. Cent. 5.

^q Ephes. c. 4. v. 28.

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of self-denial, and the renunciation of the world: still no small share of repentance is requisite in every station, previous to the acknowledgement of the truth of the gospel: and in the progress to christian perfection, an abstraction continually increasing will appear in those, who desire, with judgment, to advance from faith to faith. The nature of this repentance will be justly discerned, if considered as implying a separation from every thing that would prevent the mind, from devoting itself to a strict attendance on the commands of G o d.

Such are, in the first place, the infatuations of any sensual or worldly propensity. These are the 'thorns that choke the seed of faith as soon as it begins to germinate; prejudices, which as soon as the evidence of christianity has silenced opposition; interpose themselves, to prevent the ingenious confessions of the mind, to stop the ears against the truth, and destroy the native force, and effects of conviction. Next to these, but more sophistical, are the infatuations of intellectual vanity; which refuses instruction in the full confidence of its own sufficiency: and lastly, the still more subtle

^r Matt. c. 13. v. 22.

conceit

conceit of moral excellence ; which rejects correction, as not adapted to a character already accomplished. To persons infatuated with these false notions, the gospel is preached in vain.

But in the present constitution of man, it is not to be expected, that he shall preserve himself clear, either in his principles of conduct, or his opinions, from error and false notion. The objects of sensual desire, those present attractions which continually and forcibly excite the appetites of men, leave them not at liberty to form, by a dispassionate judgment, the principles they adopt either of conduct or wisdom. Whatever may have been the pretences or delusions of philosophy, no self denial ever was so entire, as to exclude the world and the appetites of sense from a large share in fixing the character and the notions of the man. Nor these only, but his habits of thinking likewise, would usurp a share ; and moreover those maxims of moral conduct, which he himself had devised, and to which he was addicted. All these, notwithstanding his utmost care, would give a bent to his inclination, and bias to his judgment, over which native discretion had but little influence. Hence the character of the single eye, or the mind untainted with
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false notion is no where to be found. The obedience of faith may subsist without it; provided the obstinacy of false opinion be renounced. So then, the requisite self denial is restrained to the mortification of that pride, which gives to false opinion, and the wrong principles of perverted judgment, the establishment and security, of blind and settled prejudice.

The opinions which men had formed of the world, whether established upon the authority of habitual preconception or ancient system: the author of christianity required of his disciples to hold at a distance; and to deprive them of that sway, with which they ruled the mind; an influence totally inconsistent with submission to the doctrines and the discipline of revealed religion. It was not required that all notions should be renounced, all those peculiar principles of conduct, which denominated the character of a man: for this had been impracticable. But such a humility, mortification and reformation of sentiment and desire were to be exhibited, as were necessary in those, who were called to submit themselves to the guidance of a judgment, probably, very different from their own. Whosoever applies to an advocate for counsel, or to a physician for advice, puts himself under the guidance

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of the practitioner ; giving up his own judgment, and following the direction he receives without waiting or expecting to be made to comprehend the reason of it. The disciple of Christ must follow prescription, in the same manner : and in order thereto must mortify all that obstinacy of sentiment or habit ; in short, all that conceit which opposes private opinion to divine direction.

The repentance therefore required, is the mortification of prejudice, or the renunciation of conceit of every kind.

But it is a mistake, that many professors of christianity, from a very early period to the present times, have fallen into ; that the regeneration wrought in the mind at baptism, whether divinely or by repentance, avails to the entire suppression of every sensual desire. The consequence of which tenet was, that every emotion of sensuality, after baptism ; and also every erroneous opinion, have been conceived to be acts of apostasy, a desertion of that holy calling, into which the christian has been initiated, a falling back again into perdition, and crucifying of the son of G O D afresh. For this reason, in very early ages, men and princes, aware how impracticable it was to suppress every irregular emotion, to think and act rightly at all times, deferred baptism till the period
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of life; in hopes to pass, by a quick transition, from the point of regeneration to their final trial. Yet the very circumstance, that they found themselves, after the initiation of baptism, obnoxious to the *φρονημα σαρκος*, or the infirmities of human frailty, should have taught them to form a juster idea of christian renovation; an opinion, which had they consulted the general tenor, instead of a few detached passages of the sacred scriptures, they would not have found it difficult to conceive.

There is no charm in the rite of baptism, that, at one instant, shall alter the nature and constitution of man; nor are his habits and sentiments to be rectified, by any single act of the mind, however well conceived. When we read therefore that men become, by the christian regeneration, “‘dead to sin;” that they “‘have crucified the world “‘with the affections and lusts:” it is to be understood, that by the act of repentance, all that attachment to the world is renounced, which would make it the principle of conduct, and the ruling passion to pursue the gratification of the senses. Under the discipline of the gospel, another object directs the ruling passion: and of course as “ ‘no

▪ Art. 9.

† Rom. c. 6. v. 11.

“ Gal. c. 5. v. 24.

“ Matt. c. 6. v. 24.

“man can serve two masters, and be under the dominion of two rival principles, at the same time; the gratification of sensual and natural appetite, must be postponed to the object of the gospel, now become the ruling passion.”

Besides the pride of heart, the pride of reason also must be renounced, as prejudicial in a degree but little inferior. The opinions that men have adopted, from their habits of thinking, appear to them established principles of truth: not barely conformable to right reason; but right reason itself: the standard and criterion of truth proposed to the mind. That men shall retain no opinions, or that all such as they retain shall be accurate, is not in fact to be expected. But that men shall subdue the pride of reason, such attachment to those principles they have framed, as must render them prejudiced, and indisposed to receive further information: this is highly reasonable. Nor can any thing be more so, than that man now become truly sensible, that in his mani-

* In this distinction seems to lie the true notion of sins of infirmity. Those incidental deviations from virtuous sentiment, which, though they impede the work of reformation and incumber the mind, yet take it not entirely off from its course of mortification: these prove the regeneration truly imperfect; but argue no apostasy.

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fold wants, his own moral strength and the powers of his understanding, cannot afford him effectual aid; when he comes to revealed religion for the resources of which he stands in need, should be ready to exhibit that submission to prescription, which he scruples not to pay, to the physician he consults.

But the most subtle pride remains: that of virtue. Allied to the former, inasmuch as this also is founded in reason: yet is it far less suspected, because it has more than the approbation of the principles of reason, being supported by the strong recommendation of the moral principles, such as the true, the becoming and the useful. But than this conceit hardly any other is more prejudicial. The gospel is the religion of sinners: the mind acquiescent in its own worth appears to want it not. The word of God was written to convey instruction: but to the self complacent mind already conscious of its own dignity and wisdom, no information seems requisite. Shall the truly virtuous philosopher subject those principles to the arbitration of any new doctrine, by which he has already accomplished every moral purpose? Or to what end should he submit to prescription, who by his own fa-

gacity has attained to soundness of mind and integrity of manners? Were the complacency well founded, the arguments and conclusions would be just. But being not well founded, it is truly an infatuation, how plausible soever; and deplorable is that infatuation, which precludes the use of those remedies the case requires.

Are men then, to renounce their habits of virtue, in order to render themselves qualified for the gospel? Must they commit sin deliberately, for the purpose that grace may abound? GOD forbid! Let the habits of virtue, like the principles of reason be retained; but let the vanity, the arrogance of moral wisdom, the pride of virtue and the pride of reason be taught equally to think thus: that the wisdom of man is, at best, but his opinion, his virtue but his habit; neither of them complete, or formed on principles of absolute or perfect truth. Under this conviction, let the practical and speculative philosopher equally prepare themselves, by the renunciation of selfconceit, to pay a just submission to prescription, and bend their ears with equal reverence, to the dictates of their common instructor, redeemer, saviour.

When the pride of heart, the pride of
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reason, and the pride of virtue are thus renounced, the way is open to an entire reformation. The old man, to adopt the expressive language of St Paul, thus crucified, the work of regeneration may begin; and the new man may be created, formed under the plastick hand of christian discipline.

But let it not be thought, that the work of reformation is performed at once, by one single act of renunciation, or at any single period. Though the convert have adopted the properest sentiments, though he come to the font of baptism, with a mind, like the 'infant, untainted with 'conceit; still the work of renunciation is not finally accomplished. The world and the flesh do not so easily loose their influence, nor is the efficacy of christian grace (as it is called) displayed, as our Lord exhibited the power of his word: when by one single interposition, he cast out evil spirits. The root of bitterness, the depravity remains, a wound deeply infixed in the heart: and occasions will occur from time to time, to excite the latent sparks and renew the task, as the necessity of mortification. Thus, the whole period of man's abode in this earthly taber-

' Matt. c. 18. v. 3.

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nacle is appointed for trial and probation. The single eye is no more to be obtained than the constitution without the seeds of latent malady. The influence of these defects will from time to time be perceived equally in both, to be obviated by occasional remedies and applications. But here the resemblance ceases: the difficulty of restoring bodily health, when attacked by constitutional maladies, increases with old age, till the tenement worn out with repeated shocks, can be repaired no longer. The difficulty of preserving soundness of mind decreases, as the maladies which attack it are weakened by opposition and denial: so that the task, if diligently performed, becomes every day more easy; the attacks are more and more feeble, the danger less and less imminent: till at the evening of life, the christian, exulting in assured hope, may say with the confidence of St Paul: "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me in that day."

S E R-

S E R M O N V.

G A L A T. II. 20.

The life I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.

FROM repentance let us proceed to consider the duty of faith, as of the virtue that is to mark the christian character: and in order that we may conceive rightly of the religion in which all our hopes centre; let us take every precaution, that we fall not into low and narrow notions of that faith, so much extolled by St Paul as the quality in Abraham, which the Almighty rewarded with all the favours, by which that patriarch was distinguished.

The mind accustomed to consider the repentance required by the gospel, as the denial

nial and mortification of every conceit, that might create a prejudice against the word of GOD; is led, of course, to view the virtue of faith, as the peculiar virtue of revelation: as that duty which arose out of the new relation of man, that was produced when GOD was pleased to manifest his will, in precepts and intimations delivered at his command, and under attested divine authority. Nor is such discernment an inconsiderable privilege. For it is certain, that in all moral disquisitions, the greatest difficulty lies in the incompetency of words to convey precisely the sentiments of one man to another: because, the ideas of moral virtues are combinations framed arbitrarily in the mind; and, of course, variously composed by different men: from whence it arises, that the words, being uniform, which are used to signify them, by no means express each man's peculiar idea; but become, in such application, indefinite and equivocal. It is indeed generally found, where moral questions are made the subjects of controversy, that a misunderstanding occasions the dispute; because the hearer and the speaker make use of terms in common, to which they have not affixed the same precise meaning. This difficulty, without question, attended the promulgation of the

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the gospel. As its teachers (unless they had formed a language peculiar to themselves) were obliged to express christian virtues by those terms, which in common use came the nearest in signification; and as they spake to persons who had already framed ideas, to which they were accustomed to apply these terms: unless the teacher accurately defined his meaning according to the principles of his own system; or unless his hearers were diligent to collect his sense from the general tenor of his doctrine, they could have no clear or just perception of the principles or the precepts he inculcated. By not attending to this circumstance, the following ill consequence has arisen in the discussion of christian doctrine: that undiscerning teachers, drawing their inferences from the words of the sacred writers, though they put an interpretation upon them, foreign, perhaps not consistent with the sentiments of the apostle; have perpetually found themselves involved in perplexing questions, of which they could not discover any solution. Nor indeed were such difficulties to be solved by any other method, than by reforming entirely the notions entertained of the apostolic doctrine, by collating the passage with other parts of scrip-

scripture, ^a comparing spiritual things with spiritual; and thus copying the real sentiments of the teacher, and taking pains to transcribe his spirit and his terms together. Indeed there is no doubt to be made, but that a great number of the questions, controversies and errors about christian doctrine, have arisen from misconception or false interpretation of the terms, used by the sacred writers. With this in view, let us inquire what quality or disposition was that faith in Abraham, which was ^b imputed to him for righteousness?

The life of this patriarch is the most extraordinary of any recorded in the annals of the world. Commanded, by G O D, to remove himself from one country to another, he gave an instance of migration as singular, as his preservation through life was miraculous. There are instances, in great abundance, of colonies, that by force of arms have established themselves in countries, after they had expelled, or else subdued the former inhabitants. There are also instances in history, where a ^c family having removed from one country to another, has established itself in its new settlement, by forming alli-

^a 1 Cor. c. 2. v. 13.

^b Gen. c. 15. v. 6.

^c Tarquin.

ances

ances there, as Lot did in Sodom. But, for an individual to quit the place of his father's kindred, his father's house, and his father's sepulture; and to drive his flocks into a distant land, where he not only had no manner of establishment, but also continually declined every overture towards alliance; was in the eyes of natural prudence, the most rash and unaccountable procedure. Indeed it was manifestly to expose his person and his property to every insult and depredation; and that, both with, and without the form of law: thus to sojourn among a people, not included within the protection of their laws or the security of their government; not associated with them, and without any visible resource for his preservation. But the command of G O D was explicit; and the patriarch obeyed the voice, "^aand went out, "not knowing whither he went."

The conduct of the same patriarch, when commanded to sacrifice his son, was expressive of the same disposition of mind at that time also. Though Isaac was the appointed heir of all the promises that had been made to him, he scrupled not to obey the divine command, and lifted up the knife, with a

^a Heb. c. 11. v. 8.

fixed

fixed resolution to slay his only begotten son ; of whom it was said : ° In Isaac shall thy seed be called. In both these instances the quality that distinguishes the patriarch is obedience, or implicit submission to the word of GOD ; according to the character given of him, when GOD repeated the promise to his son Isaac : “ ‘ In thy seed shall all the “ nations of the earth be blessed ; because “ Abraham obeyed my voice, and kept my “ charge ; my commandment, my statutes “ and my laws.”

But the faith, of which it is recorded, that “ “ it was counted to him for righteousness,” presents itself in a form somewhat different. After the promise made to him, of rest and establishment in the land where he then sojourned by the divine appointment ; although he had no son, and was now of so advanced an age, that there appeared almost a natural improbability that he should have issue ; ° it was declared to him by the word of the Lord, that his posterity should be numerous, as the stars of heaven. Confiding in the divine power and veracity, “ ‘ he “ staggered not at the promise,” because of this improbability ; but “ believed GOD,

° Heb. c. 11. v. 17, 18. ° Gen. c. 26. v. 5. ° Gen. c. 15. v. 6. ° Gen. c. 15. v. 5. ° Rom. c. 4. v. 3.

“ and

“and it was imputed to him for righteousness.” In this last instance, the patriarch’s faith, was implicit belief of G O D, and trust and affiance in the divine word and promises.

But let not any man, from the different appearance made by the quality in these instances of the faith of Abraham, be led hastily to conclude that the true notion of the virtue is indefinite; or that it lies more in the one, than in the other interpretation. Rather let some general principle be sought, inclusive and characteristic of them all.

The circumstance, in the life of this patriarch, which renders it so singular, is this: that, detached from his family, and visible connexions, he was called to act under immediate divine direction, and so fulfil the positive commands of G O D: whose purposes were, for the most part, mysterious to him, even while he contributed to accomplish them. And thus his virtue consisted in paying an implicit attention to every various intimation of the divine will, and conforming himself to it, as such.

The providence of G O D is in some respects to every man, the same indication of the divine will, as the word of G O D was to Abraham the father of the faithful. Since the supreme Creator impressed those laws of order

order upon the material world, by which the whole system is maintained : each body subsisting in its place, or revolving in the orbit assigned to it, is subservient to the will of him that formed it. In like manner, since the same supreme Being has impressed eternal rules of right and wrong on his rational and reflecting creatures ; he has thereby pointed out the orbit to each of them, in which the governor of the universe has designed that he should move, obedient to divine appointment : and so likewise, the allotment of each person into his particular station, marked by his qualifications, and the circumstances of good or bad fortune (as they are called) that attend him, determine what part the great manager has assigned him to perform, on the theatre of the world. To bear a mind conformable to the will of God, howsoever thus indicated, is by ethic writers denominated obedience in general : branched out into active and passive obedience, with the attendant qualities on each ; acquiescence and submission, trust, patience and resignation. * The Stoic philosophers have drawn many admirable precepts from the dominion and providence of God ; and

* See Bp Wilkins on nat. rel. B. I. c. 16, 17. and the passages quoted there.

moreover,

moreover, were the terms, they make use of, put into the mouth of a person who acted under the guidance of revelation, they would almost without any variation, express the virtue of faith entirely. For, the dispensations of providence being to the man who is governed by the moral impressions of piety, indications of the divine will; they are the very same as the word of God (but with far greater evidence) to the man, whom God is pleased to direct by the certain light of his will revealed. And, in consequence, the same resignation, and subjection of the inclinations and understanding, are unquestionably due to these manifest indications of the divine will; upon the same moral principles, as they are due to the dispensations of natural providence.

From this analogy, the declaration of our Lord will appear in a striking point of view: “¹ If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself.” For since the analogy runs quite throughout: between the dispensations of providence, and the word of God, on the one side, as the objects; and moral obedience or religious

¹ Jo. c. 7. v. 17.

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deference,

deference, and faith as the respective qualities, on the other : hence the man, accustomed to demean himself obediently, will find in him a disposition to act faithfully, when made the object of a revealed dispensation. And moreover though the question itself, whether GOD have made a revelation, be of a fact that is to be proved by reasonable evidence ; yet it will be treated in a very different manner by the person habitually under the influence of pious obedience, and one accustomed “ to live (according to the expression of St Paul ^m) without GOD in the “ world.” For the man of piety will not think himself at liberty to refuse his attention to the question ; and in his examination of the evidence, he will take especial care, that he pronounce not rashly, what GOD has or has not wrought by so special an interposition, as a revelation. And further than this, when once it is become evident to him, that GOD has thought fit to make a declaration of his will ; it will appear on the moral principles of piety incumbent on him, as a person to whom the revelation is addressed, to pay an implicit deference and obedience to every part of such a dispensation.

^m Ephes. c. 2. v. 12.

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This resemblance and analogy therefore seem plainly to point out a definition of faith, as deference to the word of G O D: or the following description of religious obedience will bear to be transferred entirely to the duty of faith, under a revealed dispensation. "The habit of obedience" (says a writer on the subject of natural religion) "may be described to consist in such a submissive frame of spirit, whereby a man doth always devote and resign himself unto the disposal of his maker, being ready in every condition, to do or suffer that, which he apprehends to be most reasonable and acceptable, and whereby he may best express his love and subjection." The quality of faith, like that of obedience, varies in appearance, according to the different tenor of the revelation that is the object of it. Thus, when the Almighty deigns, by such an interposition, to deliver his commands, whether they be moral or positive statutes, faith will be expressed by implicit submission, and dutiful conformity to the divine precepts; and this, in the language of St Paul^o, is called the obedience of faith. In like manner, if he should reveal truths,

ⁿ Bp Wilkins on nat. rel. B. 1. c. 16. v. 26.

^o Rom. c. 16.

or deliver doctrines to be received, whether the doctrines be speculative principles, promises or denunciations; even though they be ever so mysterious in their tenor and accomplishment, they will be embraced with implicit credit and the most assured assent; and this is to “^p believe God,” as the same apostle emphatically expresses himself. Such a description of the virtue of faith, which will bear to be applied to revelations of every tenor, is alone comprehensive of every expression by which the disposition of the faithful may be testified; and such alone will be found satisfactory, when the different senses in which the term is used by the inspired writers are compared with it; and still more, when compared with the various instances of the virtue in Abraham, and the numerous examples besides, recorded. From whence this conclusion follows: that faith is not justly defined, either by observance of the word of God; or belief of God: in short, that it is not limited to either, but includes the whole together.

Such is the quality, that denominated the disposition of Abraham, and all the heroes of faith before the gospel; and the same virtue is also the characteristic of the christian.

^p Rom. c. 4. v. 3.

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In contemplating the subject of patriarchal faith, it would be unpardonable to overlook the last actions of Jacobs life, as they are represented by the writer to the Hebrews. For these are beautifully descriptive of the same principle of deference to the word of G O D. This venerable patriarch had spent his life, as a pilgrim, in Canaan, obedient to divine appointment: excepting, that once before upon a former occasion, and now at the close of his life he was driven thence by a famine in search of a subsistence. Yet, it is ^a remarked of him, in this removal, that he did not desert his appointed station, till he had received expressly the divine approbation. Though he was now settled by the gratitude of Pharaoh and the care of Joseph in the richest province of Egypt, his heart was still in Canaan; nor could the plenty of Goshen on the one hand; nor the danger of a state of pilgrimage, on the other, induce him to forget that land of inheritance, which had been bequeathed to him by the Patriarchs, his fathers, and confirmed to him by repeated revelation. Under this persuasion he bound his sons, by an oath, to deposit his remains in that field of Ephron,

^a Gen. c. 46. v. 3.

which Abraham had purchased to be, as it were, a seizure of the whole possession; and having obtained assurance in this respect, “ ‘ worshipped leaning on the top of his staff,” declaring by this act, in a most descriptive manner, that he was still in his heart a pilgrim, and a sojourner in Canaan.

From patriarchal faith the transition is easy to the faith required by Jesus Christ, and the first ministers of his word. The whole evangelical histories represent in every part, that our Lord demanded of those who came to him for relief, a confession of his divine mission; or of his power to afford them the relief they desired, which was equivalent. Indeed the act of making the petition to him, implied almost as much as the confession. This confession expressed an assent of the mind to the truth, that Jesus was the son of GOD, the Messiah, in the sense in which that divine person had been promised and foretold. The assent was rationally founded upon the testimony that GOD had borne to this truth: upon the mighty works done by our Lord, and the plain completion of the scripture prophecies in his person. But the assent did by no

¹ Heb. c. 11. v. 21.

² Matt. c. 9. v. 28.

means

means stop at confession; nor did faith rest in such a bare assent of the mind to these great leading truths. When the prophet Jeremiah pronounced against Judah the judgments of G O D, even the most obstinate of that rebellious people could not but know, after the events predicted had taken place, by the captivity of the nation; that, in the person of Jeremiah, there had been, most assuredly, a prophet amongst them. But what then? The men of Nineveh, when G O D in mercy sent his prophet Jonah to them, were placed in the same circumstances with this highly favoured people. But how widely different their conduct? The men of Nineveh acknowledged the voice of G O D, in a manner effectual to their deliverance, when, corrected by the prophetic warning, "they repented at the preaching of Jonah." Such was their faith; but will the constrained acknowledgement given by alienated Judah to the prophet, denominate that rebellious people faithful, notwithstanding they refused to obey the voice of G O D, and presumptuously fled to Egypt for refuge, rather than serve the king of Babylon, under the protection of the G O D of Israel? If these indeed were faithful, then was Pharaoh also faithful, and so are those rebellious spirits,
who

' who tremble at the divine wrath while they oppose the will of Heaven.

But yet if there were no true faith in this assent, or rather in the assent which is expressed by confession, why did it avail in the times of the apostles to the admission of believers into the church, and to the participation of the christian privileges? The fact cannot be controverted. This assent of the mind is unquestionably an act of true faith. If it were not so, the doctrines of revelation, or the "truths made known to us of God" would not be objects of our faith. For an assent of the mind to them is the only testimony of obedience to the word of God; that can be shown towards these manifestations. "Abraham believed God and it "was counted to him for righteousness;" just so under the gospel, "with the heart "man believeth unto righteousness, and with "the mouth confession is made unto salvation." But as yet the christian has not advanced one step beyond the font of baptism. Having now brought the convert to Christ, he is made partaker of the redemption; his faith in the son of God, expressed by confession, is imputed to him for right-

^t James. c. 2. v. 19.
the Gal.

^u Whitby's Pref. to Ep. to
^w Rom. c. 10. v. 10.

teousness;

teoufnefs; and like Abraham he is brought nigh to GOD, and becomes an inheritor of the kingdom of Heaven. But, as he is a difciple of Chrift, he is not, in the leaft, exempted from obligation, by virtue of that character. When GOD commanded Abraham to leave his country, and to facrifice his fon; in both thefe manifestations, his affent to the word of GOD, was expreffed by obedience, nor could it be expreffed otherwife: by an obedience defcriptive of fuch an entire conformity, that neither the fuggeftions of worldly prudence, no nor yet the dictates even of parental tendernes were fuffered to ftand in competition with the will of GOD. Nor is the cafe otherwife with the difciple of Chrift. “* He that loveth “ father or mother fon or daughter, or even “ his own life more than his divine mafter, “ is not worthy of him:” nay he “ cannot “ be his difciple.” † And “ what is the love “ of GOD but to keep his commandments?” The refemblance between the difpenfation of which Abraham was, and this whereof chriftians are the objects fully eftablifhes what is here afferted. For in the gofpel there are precepts and ordinances fet forth

* Matt. c. 10. v. 37.

† 1 Jo. c. 5. v. 3.

to

to be observed, dispositions and religious qualities to be cultivated. The first disciples, according to the particular exigencies of the christian religion in those times, were like the patriarch commanded to quit every earthly tie, and setting even their lives upon the hazard, to prosecute the purposes of GOD, the propagation of the gospel, the advancement of the kingdom of the Messiah. The same is true, though in a sense a little more restrained, of the disciples of Christ in every age. They are as merchants, bartering the ease of voluptuousness, the delights of sense, whatsoever the world produces that excites desire, nay every natural appetite besides, if need require it, for the rest, for the treasure, for the precious gems, which the gospel holds forth as its rewards. As strangers and pilgrims, they are sojourning in the visible kingdom of GOD, as an earthly Canaan, in the hope of an inheritance and eternal rest in the land of promise. Was Abraham enjoined to leave his country and his kindred? The christian “^z must crucify “ the old man entirely; “ to him old things “ are past away, and behold all things are “ become new.” Was Abraham commanded

^z Rom. c. 6. v. 6.

^a 2 Cor. c. 5. v. 17.

to

to sacrifice his beloved son? The subjection of each darling passion, described by. “^b cutting off the hand and plucking out the eye “that gives offence,” is, by the unequivocal command of Christ, incumbent on his disciple. Had the patriarch, in any period of his life, taken an opportunity of “^c returning “to the country from whence he had removed,” he had apostatized from his faith: just so, if the disciple of Christ, having renounced the world “^d fall back again and be “intangled therein; his latter end is worse “than the beginning.”

We find, in the best writers on the subject of faith, definitions widely different; but this difference plainly arises from the different light, in which they view the gospel dispensation.

Bp Pearson ^e defines faith to be “the belief of things credible,” as credible. But in this definition, he has in view the articles of christian confession, of which he is writing an exposition. The objects of faith therefore which he has in contemplation, are doctrinal truths: and without question, faith with respect to doctrinal truths, is belief upon the testimony of G O D. His defi-

^e Heb. c. 11. v. 15.
 fition of the Creed.

^d 2 Pet. c. 2. v. 20.

^c Expo-

nition

nition therefore is by no means inaccurate, provided it be not considered as a definition of christian faith in general ; but of that act of faith, by which assent is given to the truths made known to us of G O D.

This definition of faith did not satisfy Bp Sherlock . “ Faith,” says he, “ which is the “ principle of the gospel, respects the promises and declarations of the gospel, and “ includes a sure trust and reliance on him “ for the performance.” In another place^e he speaks his sentiments more explicitly. “ The faith that justifies, signifies trust and “ reliance on G O D, with confident hope and “ expectation of his promises.” But (with all due deference to a judgment so superior) faith is certainly limited too much, in this definition also. The gospel is here considered not as a revelation of doctrinal or professional truth, but as a religion ; and yet incompletely as such. For the precepts, the declarations, the ordinances of God produce in the faithful, not trust and reliance, but obedience. ^b It is true the rewards are the motives and incentives to obedience, and the promises demand trust and reliance as the proper expressions of faith in the word of

^f Vol. I. Disc. 14. p. 368. 7^o.
p. 52.

^b Sherlock, Vol. I. Disc. 14.

^e Vol. II. Disc. 3.

G O D.

G O D. These promises therefore are the means by which the gospel produces its end; but not the end itself, for that is “¹to re-deem us from all iniquity, and purify unto “G O D a peculiar people, zealous of good “works.” While the means therefore receive their due share of man’s religious attention, and while they direct his hopes, his wishes and expectations; let not the end be overlooked; but let the precepts meet with their due attention also, and influence his obedience, his submission, and conformity.

I conclude therefore that neither of these definitions expresses the complete idea of christian faith, of which nevertheless they represent truly, genuine acts: while it requires terms more abstract to define faith in general. And I hope I may venture to affirm of this christian quality, that it is deference to the word of G O D. That, what pious obedience, passive obedience is, in morals, to the will of G O D; the same is faith to his word. An equal deference to all the divine manifestations, his doctrines, his precepts and his promises.

From this representation, faith, though so appropriated to revealed religion, appears

¹ Tit. c. 2. v. 13, 14.

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to be truly a moral quality, as much as resignation and submission to the dispensations of providence are moral qualities. They all result alike from the impressions of piety; from whence this maxim of Pythagoras and the Stoics was taken. *Ἐπου Θεω*^k.

The same arguments that prove faith to be a moral virtue, prove it also to be a reasonable service. For although a part of its duty consists in bending the collected principles of reason to an acquiescence in the doctrines revealed; yet is it highly reasonable that such acquiescence in prescription should be shown towards perfect truth and perfect wisdom. Especially where a man comes to be taught of GOD: for this quality is no other than what the masters in every science require of those disciples, who apply to them for their instruction.

From these remarks on the nature of faith in general, it appears that faith is the sole principle of christian knowledge and christian virtue. In the account^l of the temptation of our Saviour, it is observable, that when the seducer would have drawn him into impatience under the divine dispensations, into apostasy from God, and presump-

^k Seneca de Vitâ beatâ. Boethius de Consol. Philo. de Migra. Abrahæ. Matt. c. 4.

tion ;

tion; he took all the weapons of his defence from the scriptures: opposing to the temptation, not his own reasons, but the written precepts of G O D's law; and thus with the shield of faith, quenching the fiery darts of the wicked. Under the gentile economy it was required of every man, that he should be piously observant of the will of G O D, searching after it in every natural intimation, in the laws of reason and conscience; and conforming himself to every religious precept. In no age of the world has the great Creator left himself without witness; making, in his visible creation, a very intelligible revelation of his power and godhead; and leaving, in the discernment of good and evil, an indelible impression of his will. In the apocryphal book of wisdom it is observed^o; that they, who transferred to the creature the homage due to the Creator, were worthy of punishment for this reason, that seeing the things that are made, they did not form more just notions of the maker of them. For when the governor of the universe gave to man these moral informations, he laid an obligation on him to make a right use of them to his improvement, and

^m Eph. c. 6. v. 16. ⁿ Rom. c. 1. v. 19. ^o Rom. c. 13.

left

left him without excuse for those deviations from natural or moral truth, into which he fell by neglecting to apply these talents, through sloth or wilful perverseness. Just so, when the Almighty has made to any of his creatures, in a revelation, a more explicit manifestation of his will: he has intrusted them, by so doing, with additional advantages of improvement, as with a larger number of talents; and will require of them a greater proficiency, both in the knowledge and performance of his will. In the same manner therefore as moral piety obliges man to inquire after the commands of GOD, howsoever intimated, and to continue in them; so faith obliges those to whom a revelation has been made, to pay a religious attention to the word of GOD, and conform their understandings, their desires, their conduct, according to the manifestations, the promises, the precepts contained in it.

Faith therefore includes the whole of the christian manifestations as its comprehensive object: not that in the notion of the faith of Jesus Christ, by which the christian conducts himself, such perfection of moral sentiment has any place, as suits not with the infirmity of human frailty. A submission to prescription would not be required of a moral agent, who

who possessed a soundness of mind; and it is on account of an inherent perverseness of will in him, and infatuation of understanding, that it is made the duty of the redeemed, to regulate himself by the judgment of another, not his own. To such a character of conformity, the expression of our Saviour agrees: “^p If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed.” And in that discourse, wherein he represents himself under the image of a vine ^q, he speaks the same language most explicitly. “As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me.” To this truth, all the sacred writers give their testimony. To lead a life of faith, is to walk in the light, and to be united to Christ: and thus, as our Lord dwells in the believer by his sanctifying spirit; the believer ^s dwells in G o d by faith. Nor is the converse of the proposition asserted less plainly by our Lord: “If a man abide not in me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered.” And according to St Paul ^t: a desertion of the faith, is a departure from the living G o d through an evil heart

^p Jo. c. 8. v. 31. ^q Jo. c. 15. v. 14. ^r 1 Jo. c. 4. v. 15, 16. ^s 1 Jo. c. 2. v. 5, 6. ^t Heb. c. 3. v. 12.

of unbelief. Nay, he affirms the same truth directly, in that passage; where, speaking of the assurance of faith, or the persuasion of mind upon christian principles, "he makes use of this strong expression": "whatsoever " is not of faith is sin."

^u Rom. c. 14. v. 14.

^w Rom. c. 14. v. 23.

S E R-

S E R M O N VI.

2 P E T. III. 18.

*Grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our
Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.*

THE religion of the gospel consists entirely in the duty of faith, a virtue thus peculiar to revelation, But it would be as vain to endeavour to delineate faith completely, as to attempt to sketch out a perfect system of moral obligation: for the virtuous qualities that spring from faith, as those which reason recommends, are too numerous for the purpose; through the various tenor of the doctrines of GOD, and the difference of stations, in which our great master has allotted to each of his servants severally, to pass his days of pilgrimage and probation. But, in order that the christian's obligations

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may be discerned with greater accuracy, though systems will ever fail to express them perfectly, it seems adviseable to take a separate view of its appearances, as a professional and as a practical virtue.

Faith, the quality *required of every man who wishes to obtain the privileges of the christian covenant, is to be defined in general: deference to the word of God. A deference that implies in its description, an unfeigned assent to revealed doctrines: an implicit belief and trust in the word of God: and an absolute conformity to the precepts delivered under a divine commission. “^bWhoever define faith otherwise, if men of Judgment, differ rather in words than sentiment;” while some place that conformity among the necessary consequences, which others take into the essential properties of the virtue.

The first act of christian faith is an assent of the mind to Christ, as the saviour of the world. St Paul says: “without faith it is “not possible to please God. For he that “cometh to God, must believe that he is; “and that he is the rewarder of them that “diligently seek him.” ^c Here, the faith expressed by assent is declared to be requisite,

* Acts. c. 16. v. 31.
conclusion.

^b Whitby's Pref. to Galat.
^c B^y Sherlock, Vol. I. S. 14. p. 369.

as a part of all religion whatsoever. The same is also true of the gospel. Without faith it is impossible to enter into the christian covenant. For he that cometh to Christ for salvation must believe, as well his designation to fill the divine character of the Messiah, as his power to effect his deliverance and redemption. Upon testification of such assent of the mind, an entrance^d is given to the christian covenant. Such faith is counted for righteousness: And through the mediation of the redeemer they who before were enemies to G O D by wicked works, are reconciled by his death; are freely justified^e by the blotting out of all their former transgressions; are admitted into the kingdom of Christ, and the condition of disciples of that divine teacher, who is emphatically stiled the word incarnate.

But though this act of faith be an assent founded upon rational evidence; yet a disposition of mind to embrace whatever may appear to be the will of G O D, is necessary to enable men to be impartial judges of the evidence: and, of course, to produce such a hearty and true confession. “‘For though

^d Rom. c. 3. v. 22. Rom. c. 4. v. 24.
 Pref. to Galat. Justification.

^e Whitby's
^f Bp Sherlock, Vol. II. p. 49.

“such persuasion of mind may be attained
 “by the application of natural reason and
 “knowledge, yet the exercise of reason and
 “knowledge depends upon the will and in-
 “clination.” And, by consequence, the gos-
 pel, though attested by all the demonstra-
 tion of the spirit, “^g will be effectually hid-
 “den from those, in whom the God of this
 “world hath blinded their minds, that the
 “light of the glorious gospel of Christ,
 “who is the image of God, might not
 “shine unto them.”

For this reason, our divine master, in all
 those discourses in which he inculcated the
 nature and tendency of his dispensation, in-
 volved his meaning in the ^hobscurity of
 parables: ‘to the intent, that they, who
 were too much infatuated to hear his word
 with attention, might not have any know-
 ledge of his doctrine. And so it was, that
 of the great multitudes that heard him, in
 very many it answered the description of the
 seed that fell by the way: “and ^k the word spo-
 “ken did not profit them: not being mixed
 “with faith in them that heard it.” And
 much is it to be feared that of those also,
 who now, by name, profess themselves fol-

^g 2 Cor. c. 4. v. 3.
 Serm.

^h Jortin on parables, Vol. II.
ⁱ Luke. c. 8. v. 10.

^k Heb. c. 4. v. 2.

lowers

lowers of Christ, there are very many, who likewise are of the same description of persons that seeing, see not, and hearing the word, take no pains to understand it, and therefore hear it not, to any purpose of information. And so, they remain entirely ignorant, and are incapable during their whole lives, of making a proper confession of faith in Christ.

Be it noted therefore, that all faith, even that assent of the mind which is necessary to christian confession, must begin from repentance. The disposition of the believer must derive its birth from the ashes, from the mortification of the conceit of all former opinions. When a man is deeply sensible of his depravity and weakness: that his natural depravity makes both an atonement and reformation necessary to reconcile him to G O D, and that he is by no means able to effect either by himself: that in consequence of this depravity, the powers and sentiments of his mind and understanding are fallen into a state of weakness and infatuation; and that no exertions of his own mere strength will dispel the mist and darkness that cover him: then may he be disposed to accept of

¹ Matt. c. 6.

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the divine aid, held out to him by the christian dispensation; and to put himself with submission of will and understanding, under the direction of the christian preceptor. So just is that comparison^m of the gospel to a touchstone; by which the experiment may be made, what minds are capable of remedy.

Such are the persons who acknowledge, and apply to our Saviour as a redeemer, and a teacher sent from GOD: and then conform themselves to the consequences, that rationally follow such an acknowledgement.

But of this faith, which lies in assent of the mind, there are degrees. It is one thing to acknowledge our Lord, in general terms, to be a teacher sent from GOD: it is another, to make confession of a true faith in his doctrines, according to knowledge. The first was done by every person who petitioned for relief from his bodily distempers; for the other, even the disciples were not qualified during our Saviour's ministry upon earth. The former is the faith of a convert; the latter is the faith of an established christian, the knowledge of a proficient. The remark of Ciceroⁿ, that in the infancy of the mind,

^m Grotius.

ⁿ Serm. I. p. 11.

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the most general and fundamental principles of rational conduct exist there in a confused and undefined manner, is justly to be applied to the present subject also. In this respect there is a close resemblance between rational and christian principle. In the infancy of the spiritual mind, faith is professed; but without a clear conception of the doctrines that make up the confession, their tendency, or the professional and practical conclusions that result from them. Such clear conception is not produced without an attentive hearing and consideration of the word, and an application to it as diligent, as to the rules of any art of which men are desirous to become masters. For this reason, our Lord exhorted his disciples to take heed "° how they heard;" representing the word delivered to them, as a deposit intrusted to their management; of which, and the improvement they should make of it, he himself would one day take account.

When the endowments of man are considered, his mental as well as his animal qualifications, we are rationally led to expect, in every dispensation calculated for the use of such a creature, truths to exercise and

° Luke. c. 8. v. 18.

inform

inform his understanding, as well as precepts to regulate and control his animal faculties. The following precept of St Paul^p, among others, shows that the christian's character is not justly constituted without a justness of professional as well as practical principle: "be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is." And moreover there can be no doubt, but that a diligent application to the word of God, is required of all those, to whom God has given leisure and abilities, the qualifications necessary for such employment: that so they may make a suitable proficiency in the knowledge of the mysteries of the kingdom of God, and advance to the more abstruse doctrines of christianity.

Aristotle^q has separated wisdom from prudence, defining the one to be the knowledge of many, and those recondite truths; the other to be a quality, which applies itself to those subjects alone, that are plainly useful in life. But Cicero in his offices arranges the investigation of truth without any such distinction under the head of prudence; and makes the improvement of knowledge, in general, a branch of those duties, that fall

^p Ephes. c. 5. v. 17.

^q Ethics.

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under the idea of prudential self-government. Yet Cicero's notion of the truths to be investigated, is in reality confined to truths useful; in short, to truths that occur in course, to the writer of a book of offices. In the objects of faith, such a distinction may be likewise made: but that there is an obligation on all men universally, to acquire a knowledge answerable to Aristotle's definition of wisdom and prudence, is not true; for indeed it would not be practicable. Since the lot of a great part of our species is so entirely constituted in scenes of action and busy life; they could neither qualify themselves for, nor enter into long and abstruse speculations, without deserting their proper employments, and the important business of their stations. The truth is: the knowledge as the practice of the christian exists in various degrees of proficiency: the doctrines of G o d lying more or less remotely, and requiring of course a greater or less degree of application to reach them. There is a majestic simplicity in the gospel of Christ, by which it affords instruction to persons of all degrees of mental improvement, provided they devoutly study to understand his will; and yet this simple doctrine furnishes subjects to exercise the most cultivated understanding

standing with advantage, while wisdom is pursued with discretion. “Wherefore who-foever so represents the christian religion, as to make it a learned, an ingenious thing to be a believer, forms a mean and unworthy notion of that grace, which was revealed for the benefit of men of every rank in life.” Yet further, since it is confessedly so obvious that Aristotle’s distinction, when accommodated to a christian proficiency, between wisdom (or the semblance of it) and prudence, is not more just in reason, than discernible in real character, in which we observe practice often creep so despicably, where theory soars so high: it is plausibly said of christian knowledge; that the researches of the most exquisite subtlety are of no value, unless they conduce to actual improvement. Be it so: but on the other hand where virtue is not associated with knowledge, and founded in principle, it will suffer the fate of the seed in stony^r places; endure but for a while, and, for want of root, wither under the scorching beams of trial or persecution.

The science of the true christian philosopher is contained entirely in the holy scrip-

^r Jortin.

^s Matt. c. 13.

tures,

tures, which convey to us the sayings of our heavenly master, and the writings of those inspired teachers, to whom he committed the ministration of his word. In these sacred books, the most interesting, but mysterious truths are manifested; which are impressed upon the mind of the disciple, as the necessary articles of his confession. These manifestations are objects of christian knowledge, of which no person can safely be neglectful. The mysterious doctrine that our redemption is purchased by the blood of the great christian sacrifice; and those promises that animate the hope which is the helmet of the christian soldier; and moreover, what other doctrine soever is plainly inculcated there, as an article of professional faith; of these, the strongest and most lively impressions are evidently necessary: for had they not been necessary, the doctrines would not have been delivered to us, to be received. Or taking up the argument on other grounds; for want of information and proficiency of knowledge in these peculiar doctrines of the author of our salvation; how weak and languid have men been found in principle, unground in profession, unsettled in hope, and inanimate in discharging the functions of piety, charity and sobriety?

Moreover,

Moreover, as the precepts of our divine master are by no means delivered by him, or comprised by any inspired teacher in a system, it is not directly obvious in what manner those qualities or sentiments should be constituted, which enter into the true christian character. This is to be learned from long and diligent contemplation of the whole canon of the scriptures, the only foundation of christian doctrine. But when the caution of St Paul[†] is observed: "let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon," it will appear to be an important concern of the teacher of the word, to obtain a refined and exact perception of the truths intrusted to his ministration: that, in his discourses, he may inculcate the precepts of christianity, in their genuine spirit of refinement and excellence. For what errors have prevailed with respect to the doctrines of Christ, in any age; that did not produce ill consequences in the church infected with them? From whence has that superstition arisen, whence fanaticism, whence enthusiasm, whence the uncharitable spirit of persecution which have severally deformed the christian profession; but from erroneous interpretation of

[†] 1 Cor. c. 3. v. 11.

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the christian manifestations? And may it not be said further: whence have irresolute men received the most dangerous prejudices against the doctrine and the discipline of the gospel? Whence have infidels and heretics found the most pernicious weapons which they have wielded against the faith? Whence, the objects of the most poignant satire, the keenest ridicule, and the sharpest invective; but in the perversions of christian doctrine? Leave therefore, to those mountebanks of licentious times, the wood, hay, stubble discourses of men who talk at random; and let them utter the indigested effusions of an unreflecting mind, and unrestrained imagination; and let them look to the consequences of such presumption: but let nothing be heard from the chair of the regular divine, other than the judicious sentiments of an informed mind, the fruits of painful study and application.

There are various difficulties and obstructions, that occur to the student in spiritual things, which call for no inconsiderable qualifications to remove them, and enable him to judge of doctrine with discretion. All allegorical writings as the discourses of our Saviour are, for the most part; though intelligible enough to persons conversant in his doctrine,

doctrine, are attended with the danger, lest conclusions be drawn from them, beyond, or besides those, which were in the sentiments of the teacher himself. But all our Saviour's discourses are not equally plain and explicit. There were many truths in his gospel, of which not even the disciples at first, much less the mixed multitude of followers, were qualified to become advantageous hearers. These truths he delivered in such a manner, that lying concealed, they might not offend minds too much prepossessed: but that the attentive hearer, who diligently and faithfully studied his word, might perceive them in the course of his application; and find his improvement proportionably advanced.

If these difficulties arise in the reading of our Saviour's own discourses with critical and minute attention; far greater will be found when the student applies himself to study and understand the epistolary writings of the first inspired teachers. For the prejudices which obstructed the advancement of the christian doctrine, and the disputes and errors that vexed and corrupted the church in the earliest age, produced most of those epistles of St Paul and the other apostles, which are included in our sacred books. In the perusal of these writings, many false notions would
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be avoided, did men always keep in mind the persons for whose use, and the purposes for which they were immediately written. The persons to whom they were addressed were all, new converts, young and unsettled in the faith; and hardly weaned, at best, from the prejudices, the national and popular prejudices of their former sentiments. To such, no apostle could write as unto spiritual: the labour of the teacher was not to build up the disciple to perfection; but rather by the tenderest care to nourish and keep alive an infant faith. In writing to such persons, the minister of the word was not discharged from that controversy, and those representations of the christian doctrine, which were adapted to convince the most virulent adversaries of the faith. For his unsettled converts, still dwelling among such, were liable, obnoxious in an extreme, to the popular topics, which prevailed with bigotted men against the new doctrines. By these topics they were ever in danger of being perverted from the faith, they had embraced; more especially when to sophistical arguments were added the strongest personal inducements: fear of persecution, of imprisonments, loss of all things, desertion of relations and friends, torture, death and ignominy. But

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if

if the disciples were proof against these trials, and not to be prevailed on absolutely to apostatize: yet, there ever appeared a conceited spirit of dogmatizing in some perverse men; who, wedded to their former notions, and attempting to reconcile them with the doctrines of Christ, had become the authors of destructive heresies. To these, as novices, they were liable to swerve, and so turn aside, even within the threshold of the church. On both these accounts, the sacred teachers were confined, in their labours, to the confutation of the prejudiced spirits of infidelity, that either barred the entrance of the church, or seduced those away who were entering: or else they were engaged in contending with that perverse spirit of dogmatizing, allied intimately with the former in its notions and principles; which, if it did not draw disciples from communion with the faithful, made them unstable at the best, where it prevailed; most probably contentious and heretical. In short, to express myself in St Paul's own words: his general purpose was, to provide his infant converts with the "sincere milk of the word that they might grow thereby; because they were as

" 1 Cor. c. 3. v. 2.

yet

yet unable to bear strong^w meat; or doctrines accommodated to the nourishment and proficiency of those, who by reason of use, had their faculties exercised, and were able to distinguish in principle, between good and evil tendency. This is remarkably true of St Paul; who, considering himself more particularly as the apostle of the gentiles, though he still bore the strongest national attachment to his own countrymen; entered deeply into the discussion of those doctrines in which the gentile converts were more particularly concerned, or most liable to be perverted. This made him insist so continually on the gracious acceptance of sinners, and labour so much in asserting the free justification of the faithful; in opposition to those Jewish teachers who demanded the observance of all the ordinances of Moses. These and such discussions of mysterious doctrine, rendered still more obscure by the bewildering sophisms and false notions to which they were opposed, have made St Paul's epistles more especially hard to be understood; of which, as it was true in St Peter's time, it has manifestly appeared in every age since,^x that the unlearned and unstable have ever

^w Heb. c. 5. v. 14.^x 2 Pet. c. 3. v. 16.

wrested them, not more to the destruction of themselves, than the perversion of christian faith, and annihilation of christian unity. Thus while the apostles had to minister to such novices in spiritual things, they could not 'leave the elementary doctrines of the gospel: repentance from dead works, the faith expressed by confession, the doctrines of baptism, and of justification by the christian atonement: and thus were they prevented, by the necessities as well as weak understandings of their infant churches, from proceeding in direct continued discourses to those instructions, which were calculated to assist the more adult; who having made some proficiency, were followers of those patriarchs, that through patience in a faith more and more established, had inherited the promises. This so particular appropriation of the doctrines, for the most part, that occur in the epistolary writings, occasions no little obscurity in them, and obliges the student, to inquire with diligence, what was the state of those churches as to doctrine and manners, to whom they were addressed: that so, he may enter into the sense and spirit of the sacred writer.

⁊ Heb. c. 6. v. 1.

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The form also, in which the sacred books convey the divine truths to us, occasions some labour to read them with precise discernment, and understand them accurately. A dead language as is that of the scriptures is not to be learned with critical skill; without painful study, and laborious researches both grammatical and philological: but then, to balance this inconvenience, words in a dead language, if a learned language, have a signification far more definite and explicit, through the industrious labours of critical writers, than can be said of any living language, or any now in use. But how far this will apply exactly to the sacred writings, will admit of some doubt. It has been said of Aristotle that his terms are only to be explained from himself: much more is this true, for obvious reasons, of the inspired writers; that they can only accurately be understood by comparing spiritual things with spiritual.

Yet further, prophecies are ever obscure in their stile and nature, and so are those passages in the new testament which foretell the state of christianity in future times. Books of prophecy are ever sealed² books,

² If. c. 29. v. 10.

till the event unfolds them ; and in the reading of them, there is great danger ; left imagination usurp upon sober criticism ; and prescribe, under the notion of explaining them, a series of events, that are merely conjectural and fantastical.

But these difficulties will hardly be mentioned as such, when viewed in comparison with the obstruction that has arisen from the vain sophistry, which has gone on in every age perverting the truth, and perplexing the mind of every attentive inquirer, with foolish^a and unlearned questions. In contemplating the christian manifestations, there have ever been men of much learned leisure, who, employing their talents in the search of recondite truths, have fallen, for want of discretion, into the regions of truth, neither the objects of the human understanding, nor yet the subjects of divine manifestations. Such vain occupations have been the unhappy source of those foolish questions, as St Paul calls them, which have involved such proficients in wrangling and vain controversy. And while neither party had a clear conception of the doctrine for which they were contending,

^a 2 Tim. c. 2. v. 23.

they

they were ever liable to those ill consequences in argument, which ignorance of the point in question is so apt to produce. But however, though absolute mysteries have administered questions to sophistry, they have given this useful lesson; that in subjects of pure revelation, the mind is quickly bewildered when it quits sight, though but for ever so short a space, of the clear light of the word of G O D.

Yet further, since there are, in the divine manifestations, truths abstracted from vulgar apprehension, and mysterious in various degrees: it has happened; that men, by intruding, without necessary previous erudition, into the more abstruse parts of christian doctrine, have perplexed themselves on subjects, which, though not absolutely mysterious, were so to them, because they had not as yet arrived by the gradual advances which lead to them, to that eminence of learning from whence they might clearly discern them. This want of discretion which induces men to argue and draw conclusions from doctrines, before they themselves have obtained a clear conception of them, has given rise to those unlearned questions, which originate in a fallacy. By sophists of both these descriptions the simplicity

plicity of the christian doctrine has been much corrupted, while such unskilful teachers have talked and written at random, for want of knowing^b clearly what they said, or whereof they affirmed. Hence it is become a proof of no vulgar discretion, justly to discriminate between doctrines as they are taught: whether they are objects of knowledge, and deserve to be inquired into; or such fruitless questions, as would only prove obstructions in the way of the christian philosopher to proficiency in speculative faith, or spiritual knowledge.

The following distinction, justly noticed, will contribute towards forming so desirable a discretion. As faith in general consists in a diligent adherence to prescription; and not, by any means, in a perfection of sentiment, which is not in fact consistent with human frailty: so professional faith lies in conformity of sentiment to revealed doctrine, and does not imply a perfect attainment, or complete comprehension of those revealed mysteries, which we now see through a glass, darkly; and therefore never perfectly understand. Hence christian knowledge is far different from every other kind of knowledge,

^b 1 Tim. c. i. v. 7.

whether

whether physical or experimental: inasmuch as the conviction, upon which the doctrines are received as principles, arises simply from the demonstration that G O D has declared them, and not any internal evidence, as it is called.

If so, it seems to follow, that the safest conduct for the christian student, when questionable doctrines fall in his way, as soon as he finds that he cannot discern their connexion or repugnance, to the word of G O D; is to throw aside the controversy entirely, before his judgment is quite bewildered in it. Nor will he, by such a conduct, forego an opportunity of improvement; for no sooner shall his native sentiment recover from the embarrassment which the controversy had produced; than, if he be well versed in the sacred scriptures, he will find it far more easy to discern, what, in most questions, comes the nearest to the doctrine of G O D; than he could have made it by the most laborious perusal of the arguments brought by both parties. For since, under the christian discipline, doctrines are received into the principles of men, while still mysterious; those persons are very liable indeed, to error and false notion, who presume to dogmatize on such mysterious principles,
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and when once the human mind is enveloped in such error, it wanders blindly on, misled by its opinion, as an ignis fatuus of its own formation; till at last it puzzles itself so effectually, that it becomes totally infatuated. And there is no little danger in attempting to follow such error through all its intricacies and subterfuges. Unless a man be possessed of uncommon penetration, he will find it impossible to disperse the clouds thrown round the subject, so as to preserve a clear and candid judgment amidst such a scene of disorder and confusion.

The principal therefore, nay almost the sole object of the man who would obtain a refined professional faith, is to make himself deeply conversant in the word of GOD. First, by the helps of sober criticism and comparison to prove the force of the expressions. Then, by gaining a distinct apprehension of the meaning of the terms used by inspired writers, to obtain an accurate conception of the doctrines and precepts delivered under them. And lastly, as the result of all these pains, to acquire a comprehensive knowledge if it may be obtained; and to crown the whole, a devout and lively impression, of the nature, the tendency, and great importance of our high calling of God
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in Christ Jesus, and of the privileges and advantages that attend it. And when it is considered what funds of information the christian revelation opens to the mind, what helps it affords to the perception of refined truth, and what obstacles it removes: the obedience of faith, even in respect to the formation of the understanding, and although it lies not so much in investigation of truth, as in contemplation of divine manifestations, appears the reverse of superstition, the truest free thinking, and perfection of human wisdom.

But lest this knowledge should have a bad effect upon the mind, and puff it up as St Paul^c expresses himself, let a man ever so account of all these acquisitions, as our Lord prescribes^d to his disciples, with respect to their practice. "When ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, we are unprofitable servants; we have done that which was our duty to do." Much more than this may be truly said of the knowledge to be acquired, by the most devout application to the word of GOD; for perfection belongs not to human opinions. Improvement, even under the radiance of the holy scrip-

^c 1 Cor. c. 8. v. 1.

^d Luke. c. 17. v. 10.

tures

tures must still be progressive : and yet after all, as the eye absolutely single, so an accomplished erudition in spiritual knowledge exists not in this imperfect state. For now we see through the medium of intellects never perfectly spiritualized. We^e see, but it is, as through a glass, darkly : while the consummation of wisdom as of virtue, is the privilege of that state of beatification alone, in the realms of perfect light.

Besides this reason for possessing all speculative improvement with modesty, to what comparative eminence soever it may attain, St Paul^t insists on this other motive. “What have we in the objects of christian knowledge that we have not received? If so, how can we glory as if we had not received them?” As if the knowledge we acquire, were the fruit of our own penetration, the result of superior genius and sagacity ; and not, as it is in fact, a bare perception of the manifestations made to us by G O D : in his most refined conception of which, man can possibly have no higher praise, than of attentive and diligent application to the word of G O D.

But this is not all, vain conceit and chris-

^e 1 Cor. c. 13. v. 12.

^t 1 Cor. c. 4. v. 7.

tian

tian faith are opposite and irreconcilable in their nature. As every unregenerate conceit will prove a bar against the initiation of the christian; so, every conceit taken up after admission will obstruct the progress of faith; and if not renounced, will oblige him in time to turn aside, and to renounce his faith. Yet 'tis true, we meet in the epistles of St Paul, with precepts to this purport: “^a be “ not carried about like children, with every “ wind of doctrine: and, “^b hold fast the form “ of sound words that ye have received.” In which precepts, a considerable confidence and assurance of faith are prescribed. But the objects of such assurance are the sacred oracles themselves, which as far as their clear unequivocal light will direct us, are unquestionable authority of doctrine and of principle. But the doctrines that have been framed, since the ages of inspiration, are an object widely different. Through the conceit, through the vain curiosity, through the sleight and cunning craftiness of men, the simplicity of the gospel of Christ has been corrupted, and foolish and unlearned questions, vain philosophy, with pernicious and abominable heresies have been brought in,

^a Ephes. c. 4. v. 17.^b 2 Tim. c. 1. v. 13.

upon

upon pretended authority of the word of G O D. In opposition to these, some learned, and some well meaning men have attempted to explain and define the true doctrine : and moreover, to exclude heretics from the communion of the faithful, forms of confession have been framed upon these explanations. These confessions are wisely required, as things are now constituted, that religious communities and national churches may be established upon a general uniformity of sentiment : so that pernicious heretics being excluded, the society may be maintained in unity of spirit, and the bond of peace. But the doctrines that are defined in the confessions of national churches are rather conclusions from the word of G O D, than the important doctrines of religion. There are many errors and false notions which, in articles of communion, are judiciously prescribed against ; and yet the questions, that gave rise to them, come not professionally, by any means, into the contemplation of the believer. Nay, many of the doctrines, by which such errors are opposed, are no where clearly defined, much less prescribed as articles of faith or confession, in the sacred writings. Nay more than this, when men of learning and leisure have made such doctrines

trines objects of disquisition, no two of them perhaps have framed their notions with an exact uniformity. In such points of dogma, meekness and modesty of sentiment characterize the true believer, how clear and refined soever his conceptions. In the discussion of such questions he treads on dangerous ground. A confidence, or vain conceit of his qualifications, while he cautiously avoids an error on the one side, may expose him to the danger of falling into the opposite extreme. But if it does not so betray him, if it render him opinionated, obstinate and dogmatical in his notions, it shuts up the passages to improvement, and roots up that christian charity, which shall have place above, even at that future period, when faith and hope shall be no more.

S E R M O N VII.

J A M E S. I. 22.

*Be ye doers of the word and not hearers only,
deceiving your own selves.*

IT is impossible to read the discourses of our divine master with serious attention, and not perceive the strongest moral tendency in every part of them. In that upon the mount, he inculcates in the most direct terms, an exalted piety towards God, a social disposition the most generous, and the strictest self government. If the student pass on from this discourse and consider the doctrines of his master as they are to be collected from his parables, still he will perceive the strictest obligation laid upon him to continue, in what St Paul calls, the obedience of faith; or in conformity to a discipline, productive

ductive of no vulgar moral accomplishments. Nay, the ' exclusion of those from the divine favour, who fail of such a conformity, is plainly denounced in more than one parable : and yet, that a truth so important might not be overlooked, it is not inculcated in parables alone : but also laid down in other parts of his discourses ^b, in the most direct and explicit terms. From the gospels let the student pass on to the epistles, even to the most controversial writings of St Paul. It must be confessed, from the terms in which the apostle found it necessary to state the doctrines of justification in the sight of G O D, and the divine acceptance of sinners graciously, in opposition to erroneous teachers ; that unlearned and unstable men have actually drawn conclusions from these, as if Christ required not obedience in manners, of his followers. But this conclusion was not justly chargeable on the apostle ; for in every such epistle, after the controversial topics are discussed, he ever proceeds to deliver moral precepts, rules of conduct in the several relations of life : and constantly describes the state of men comprehended under the christian mercy, as of men ' created in

^a Matt. c. 25. v. 1.
c. 2. v. 10.

^b Matt. c. 7. v. 21.

^c Ephes.

Christ

Christ Jesus unto good works, which "God hath before ordained that we should walk in them." But if some entire books of St Paul had been hard to be understood in any moral sense; others of his writings most fully assert the christian obligations to live according to the precepts, the moral precepts of the gospel. Nay if the whole of St Paul's writings had been confined to controversy, and of course had been merely doctrinal, and conveyed no moral instruction; still, the writings of the other inspired teachers, ought sufficiently to have defended the christian doctrine against any such interpretations as gave a description of the christian religion, different in idea, from a doctrine according to godliness.

From the period of repentance the convert, justified, by the grace of God, through faith, and regenerated by baptism, proceeds to cultivate his faith, ^dinconsiderable though it be, in the beginning, as a grain of mustard seed: that, being watched with incessant care, and weeded by continual mortification, it may ^egrow to maturity; and bring forth ^f, by perseverance in the christian discipline, the fruits of the spirit in abundance.

^d Matt. c. 13. v. 31. Matt. c. 17. v. 20.
c. 4. v. 26, 27.

^f Luke. c. 8. v. 15.

^e Mark.

Many persons in the age nearest to that of the apostles, having experienced the difficulty of struggling against the temptations of the world, and sensible that they were always in danger, by their intercourse with it, of being again intangled in the affections, which they had denied, therefore renounced all society, and fled to deserts and solitude as an asylum. But, allowing that by such retirement they were enabled to obtain the true ideal philosophic freedom from passion (which is not the case) their conduct is not to be approved. For, in the first place, they put it out of their power hereby to perform their part in life, and to adorn the station in which providence had placed them with the virtues of their christian profession. And, furthermore, such apprehensions are not to be reconciled with a due attention and faith in those promises of their master, by which they are taught to look for every aid, in return to the prayers of the faithful, which the exigencies of their situation may at any time demand. Their motives therefore of precaution and expediency are by no means admissible, and their conduct, upon this plea at least, is injudicious, if not censurable.

To frame a compendium of christian ethics, from the laws and precepts as they lie scattered

tered in the word of GOD, is an attempt far beyond my ambition. That no such compendium was framed in the age of inspiration, is a proof (if a proof were necessary) that the christian dispensation was not designed entirely or principally to appear as a religion; no not though the end of GOD in the redemption of mankind, was "to purify a peculiar people to himself, zealous of good works." Yet, although the gospel does not furnish its disciples with a regular system of ethics; its precepts bespeak so refined a spirit of morality, and convey principles of such accomplished virtue, in every branch of moral instruction, as to leave no room to regret the absence of a systematical religion. But who can catch the spirit of consummate purity and truth? Or what mortal can dispel those mists which dim his present sight, so as to discern, on his characteristic principles, the perfect fair and good completely? While the son of GOD taught his chosen disciples in person, there were many, very many things that occurred to him in the course of his instruction, which yet he could not communicate, because his followers were not able to bear, and could not receive them. So will it be, to the end of time: such incapacity, however remedied
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in part by christian discipline, will lie upon every son of Adam, while he still bears the image of his earthly progenitor.

Let us follow nevertheless, at whatever distance from the truth, the course of our meditations.

St Paul has comprised the moral precepts of his Lord in the exhortations, to live soberly, righteously and godly in this present world : following herein the ordinary distinctions of moral virtue, into the private, the social, and the religious.

The exhortation to live soberly is rather a negative precept, if taken in a sense no more extended, than the words convey, according to the English idiom ; for in its utmost latitude it goes no farther, than to forbid all those excesses, which disorder the mind or body. But in this sense it falls far short of the apostle's meaning, and does not come up even to the philosophical idea of soberness. The term^a he uses to express the quality, has perhaps the most comprehensive signification of any found in ethic writers ; and to live soberly (in St Paul's idea^b) is to possess three of the cardinal virtues : prudence, fortitude, and temperance, and includes all those

^a Σωφρονως.

^b Mens fana.

internal

internal graces that become a sound mind, attentive to the improvement, regulation and government of itself.

Christian soberness is the same excellent quality, as philosophic prudence; of which the improvement of the understanding and the cultivation of knowledge, are essential parts: but the objects of inquiry that philosophic prudence and christian soberness, equally, recommend, by no means terminate in uninteresting theory; for while the one employs the mind about whatever is true, becoming and useful in the several relations of life; the other directs the search to whatever in sentiment and conduct becomes the gospel of Christ; and to the manner in which the faithful professor should think and act at all times. Yet the task of ethic prudence and christian soberness is not ended in the cultivation of the understanding: for from hence the first proceeds by the subjection of the appetites, to keep the judgment free, dispassionate and collected; that it may not be swayed by any improper motive, that it may neither be deceived by appearances; nor hurried into unbecoming determination and conduct by surprise and precipitancy. The same is true of christian soberness: for though the most distinguished knowledge were attained;

tained; and the christian philosopher could investigate¹ with great acuteness the most abstruse doctrines; or define, with accuracy, upon the most perplexing questions, that occupy the vain and the unlearned to so little purpose; yet, unless an accomplished practice resulted from all this knowledge, it would become an unsubstantial basis of christian hope, a vain science of unfruitful speculation. But, if it prevail to the suppression of the sensual and worldly appetites; so as to transfer the wishes and desires of the redeemed, from things temporal to things eternal; if it prevail to the subjection of all those worldly fears², and worldly motives, which stand in the way of undistinguishing obedience to the commands of GOD: then is it (incomplete though it be in this state of frailty) intitled to the honourable denomination of christian soberness. What then is the most characteristic feature of this refined, this excellent moral quality? If, where the whole is in some sense peculiar and appropriate, inasmuch as the christian mind receives its whole direction from the word of GOD, any line can indeed be called more eminently characteristic than another: per-

¹ 1 Cor. c. 13. v. 1.² Matt. c. 10. v. 28.

severance

severance in that disposition which at first denominated the convert, seems the most distinguishing feature of christian soberness. For the greater part of our master's blessings are, in the strictest interpretation of the words, annexed to this temper: "blessed are the poor in spirit, blessed are they that mourn, blessed are the meek, blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness." In which words, the mortified spirit, the converted^m, single mind untainted with conceit, the diffident and modest temper, and the anxious cultivator of every virtuous disposition; in short the spirits disposed to follow an humble unassuming faith, are most eminently endowed, according to the divine word and promises, with all the privileges of the gospel. But neither a vain confidence and furious zeal for dogma, or opinion; nor on the other hand a careless inattention to the repositories of sacred doctrine, can be derived from this source; any more than pride, envy, wrath, voluptuousness and sensuality; to which they are most commonly allied either as causes or effects. For however any of these may carry before them, as a pretext, the love of truth, of G o d, and of

¹ Matt. c. 5.^m Matt. c. 18. v. 3.

religion;

religion ; or of peace and charity : still the expressions will betray the origin of such dispositions, and show them sprung from obstinate and inveterate conceit, or unmortified ungodly lusts.

Such the source, and in such channel runs the first branch of christian morality : the next fountain of duty, that occurs in this passage of St Paul, is to live righteously.

To render to all men what is due to themⁿ, and that, not only in questions of property, but also of honour and respect ; and perform besides, the offices of humanity, liberality, and good nature ; seem to comprehend every social obligation. But if to follow the rule of right be considered as a principle of behaviour laid down, it is by far too vague and abstracted to serve as a directory what conduct becomes a man at all times. For though that sense, which is common to all the partakers of reason, points^o out what is just and equitable in the conduct of one man to another, to be also true becoming and useful in the highest degree, whether a man be considered singly, or in his relative capacity ; yet it is unquestionable that by the intricate combinations of contingent circum-

ⁿ Rom. c. 13. v. 7.
Off. L. I. § 10.

^o Cic. de Leg.

^p Cic. de

stances,

stances, not only the appearances, but, in some sense, the nature of things may be so altered; that the best casuist could not invariably define with precision, what conduct was becoming, according to the most perfect equity. The principle therefore is more vague than becomes the universal standard of civil and social obligation: but were it more definite, while it is left to every man to interpret this rule for himself, it will be found dangerous, as an arbitrary standard, in the hands of man; whose selfish passions and affections are too strongly interested in the intercourse of life, to permit him to explain, with unbiassed judgment, in his own case, the dictates of an abstract general precept. For this reason, our divine master, even when he had substituted, in the precept of philanthropy, his own peculiar principle of social obligation; did not send his disciple to those social affections implanted in man, to be taught how to apply this principle; although these affections very forcibly incline him to sympathy and humanity: but adapted^a self-love to his purpose, and left it in charge to his followers to love their neighbour as themselves, and perform that part to others,

^a Matt. c. 7. v. 12.

which

which their own wishes would lead them to expect, in an exchange of circumstances. By the transformation of the principle of social obligation from moral justice to christian charity, the demands of one man upon another, wear a very different aspect from that which appears upon the statings of lawgivers and philosophers. Under this new social principle, forbearance and the forgiveness of injuries, with all those virtues that bespeak a lowliness and meekness of disposition, appear in the foremost rank of duties; and it must be acknowledged, that however, by the standard of philosophic truth or self estimation, they may be condemned as ' the weakness of timid or indolent men; yet when they flow from this right principle, they are noble and amiable qualities, highly conducive to the peace and well ordering of society, allied to fortitude, and expressive of no vulgar conquest over the passions. So comprehensive is this principle of charity that under it every law of the second table is inculcated. ' For the commandments: thou shalt not kill; thou shalt not commit adultery; thou shalt not steal; thou shalt not bear false witness; thou shalt not covet; honour thy

^x Cicero.

^y Rom. c. 13.

father

father and mother: all these, and if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying: thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. For love worketh no ill to his neighbour, therefore love is the fulfilling of the law: because this amiable virtue of charity exercised according to the standard of self-love, and subsisting jointly with that meek and modest temper, the dictate of christian soberness, leaves no room for wrath, strife, seditions, envyings, and vain glory: while^t each is disposed to esteem other better than himself; and is taught to seek^u not his own but the good of others.

The third branch of duty, is to live godly in this present world.

In this precept is comprised the first of all human obligations (both in its object and for its extensive influence) the duty to the greatest and best of beings.

These obligations, seem by equitable construction to have received considerable augmentation since the redemption of the human race, the mysterious expiation of the offences of the species, and satisfaction by the blood of the great christian sacrifice. But what new expressions of piety can be added to the

^t Phil. c. 2. v. 3.

^u 1 Cor. c. 10. v. 24.

dictates

dictates of natural light and natural conscience? Can submission and devotion be greater? Can fear, and reverence be more full, than what was due, by the law of reason, to the Creator the governor of the world, the remunerator of moral agents? What pious sentiments of G O D, in short, can be now adopted, in addition to those before enforced by former manifestations of himself? But though it be not possible to think of G O D more highly than the light of nature discovered him, man seeth himself in a far different light. He no longer appears a moral agent, standing high in the divine favour by the preeminence of his species, and the excellence of his moral accomplishments: but as a being convicted of having depraved his moral sense; by a mere act of grace, restored to the divine favour; and now subsisting in it by the continuance of that same ceaseless bounty. His confidence is not now the conceit of merit; but the affiance of modest faith in the divine promises; his assurance is the assurance of hope alone; while even his virtue no longer redounds to the praise of a cultivated moral sense; but subsists in the practical profession of faith, the submissive obedience to christian precept. Notwithstanding these peculiar sentiments of the

the christian, the acts of devotion may still be justly viewed as formerly, and divided into those of a public nature, as worship and profession, and private expressions, as prayer, supplication and thanksgiving.

There is no country so savage, no nation so barbarous (says the Roman orator) in which an establishment of public worship is not to be found. The modes of worship have ever been as different as the languages of nations: and the same is true in christian countries, that their religious rites and ceremonies, and their public liturgies are peculiar to national churches: but times, persons and places have been set apart universally for the service of religion. Passing over those reasons for the institution of religious assemblies, as beside our purpose, rational and cogent though they be, which arise from instinctive impressions of the power and universal sovereignty of GOD: the zeal of men for the increase and continuance of public welfare, whether the community be a political body, a corporate or still narrower circle, would seem of course to point out a social devotion, and so would the interest of the church of GOD, by religious assemblies, best extended and advanced. But the divine precept by which social worship is directed,

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is explicit: and the performance is encouraged besides by the promise of our Lord himself: "that where his servants are assembled for this purpose, he will be in the midst of them," most propitiously to hear and answer their petitions.

Add to this, that men by their regular appearance in the congregations of their christian brethren, make an open profession of their union with Christ and with his church. This certainly was a reason, as well as the instruction of the apostles, why the disciples were so continually assembled for religious purposes, as they are represented to have been in the earliest period of the church; for which duty, the large funds raised by throwing all the property of christians into a common stock, and the constant distributions made out of it, gave them leisure, without any secular interruption. The practices, as the circumstances of the church, have since altered: yet the usefulness of public exhortation, if not of public instruction, as well as the honour of God, which is reflected by an universal profession of religion, renders a due attendance on public worship, a duty to which the practice of the truly wise and

^w Acts. c. 2. v. 42, 46.

good

good in every age, have given a better sanction and testimony, than that it should now be laboured, as a point of doctrine requiring new proof or confirmation.

But profession is not confined to temples or the times of religious assembly: there must occur to every man, frequent occasions besides, in which the concealment of his principles will be equivalent to a denial of them. An instance of this is recorded by St John^x: “among the chief rulers, says the “evangelist; many believed on our Lord; “but they did not confess him, lest they “should be put out of the synagogue.” Had these men stood forth in vindication of the Messiah in the Sanhedrim, or had they given him their countenance with the people, they might have done the cause of his faith essential service; but they were afraid of sharing the fate of a devoted man; and therefore by their silence, and acquiescence, appeared to join in the sentence of his enemies. Such cold friends as these therefore are included, no less than adversaries in this sentence of our Lord^y: “whosoever shall confess me “before men, him shall the son of man confess, before the angels of God: but he

^x C. 12. v. 42.

^y Luke. c. 12. v. 8, 9.

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“ that

“ that denieth me before men, shall be denied before the angels of God.” Thus is it declared to be not less a duty of christianity, than it is a suggestion of fortitude, to avow and defend what is right: insomuch that he is not more a christian, than he is a man of moral character, who from timidity or any sordid passion, denies or acts against his principles, or silently suffers them to be condemned. Notwithstanding this: some bounds are to be set to profession. For a fervent zeal, subsisting even with a single and good intention; yet, without knowledge, will ever do more harm than good to the cause that it espouses. In the first persecutions many warm men obtruded themselves upon the magistrates, desiring to be allowed to confess and suffer for their faith. The vulgar, taken with the appearance of resolution, and forward attachment to the cause, highly applauded this conduct: not so the wiser rulers of the church: these gave it as their advice, by no means to run needlessly into danger. For it was proved, by many disgraceful examples, that a fervour of zeal might carry those into temptation, who, not having strength of mind to support them under the horrors of torture and a lingering death, in the hour of trial retracted their confession,

confession, and basely apostatized from the faith.

From public profession and service, godliness willingly retires to private devotion; where, concealed from every mortal eye^{*}, no temptation may intrude to prompt a sinister motive, or call off its attention. To this sacred retreat, ostentation and hypocrisy cannot approach.

Not that devotion is confined to cloisters, to solitude or to closets. The holy spirit, abiding continually in the heart of the true professor, consecrates it, to be a temple for himself: a temple in which every act of devotion is constantly performed; but in a manner, perceivable by him alone, who seeth in secret. Thus, his religion enters, with the man of business, even into the public walks; not to distract his attention, not to check his industry: but in success to govern him, to be a guide to him in difficulties, a guardian in dangers, and a refuge in distresses.

Yet not content with this habitual exercise, Christian godliness has also its seasons of private prayer; in which it may pour forth every affection that is consistent with its habitual temper, its fears, its wishes and

^{*} Matt. c. 6. v. 6.

its gratitude: when every offence and every folly may be acknowledged, when pardon, aid, and all improvement may be supplicated, and every mercy received may be referred to him that gave it.

Thus does the doctrine of G O D our Saviour operate on the minds, and influence the whole conduct of his servants: pervading their dispositions and directing those secret springs of their actions, by which their character in every relation is denominated.

All virtues like all sciences bear a near affinity to each other, and are linked together by a close and indissoluble tie; so that if one be cultivated, it will introduce the rest; or one be excluded, the rest must follow. Thus without christian soberness, the social virtues and charity fade, and even change their nature. What: though there be the most unreserved beneficence, in such profusion as shall pass with the inconsiderate, for the highest liberality: yet, unless it be guided by prudence and discretion, it will drain to waste the sources of real beneficence, and not leave sufficient to answer the claims of justice and equity. Without soberness, godliness also loses its venerable aspect. It may be superstition or enthusiasm or fanaticism,
but

but there can be no true profession where zeal and knowledge are not associated.

In like manner without charity, or christian social virtue, ^a soberness and prudence degenerate into mere selfishness, a selfishness the more dangerous to society, the more collected it be within itself, the more correct its measures. And as to godliness: without charity it is the mere grimace of religion, a formal hypocritical profession, abominable in the sight of GOD: for GOD is not mocked; and himself hath commanded "^b that he "who loveth GOD, should love his brother "also.

Lastly; without godliness there can be no true or useful religion whatever. Atheists and Deists may talk, as they please, how conformable truth is to nature, and of the natural obligations to intrinsic virtue, independent of the consideration of the will of GOD. But what is to restrain men from following the most pernicious appetites who live without GOD in the world? Experience has shown in every age, that neither the beauty of virtue, nor all those reasons, which in theory render it so lovely and amiable, were ever able to form a barrier against the

^a Cicero.

^b 1 Jo. c. 4. v. 21.

violence of passion and appetite: and that every additional sanction of human laws, of the reciprocal ties of honour, and the fears of an equitable retribution at the hand of the supreme Being; were requisite to enforce the virtues which are necessary for the subsistence of society. But in a consideration of practical faith, or christian morality, this method of reasoning upon expediency, is by far unequal to the argument it goes to confirm. Our profession has for its inducements, a painful sense of natural depravity, and consequent estrangement from GOD; and a suitable pleasure in the assurance of redemption from such a state, effected. A mind therefore still wandering in habitual estrangement, entirely prone to the things of that world through which it is passing, untouched with sentiments of piety, is totally inconsistent with the spiritual life of the believer.

Such are the fruits of faith acting under christian discipline. How complete and perfect the character in which christian soberness, charity and godliness, are properly blended and united. Such are the fruits^c also by which the tree may now be known,

^c Matt. c. 7. v. 16.

and

and will be judged hereafter. When the author of our faith shall take account of all the talents now so variously distributed, an improvement in a small degree shall not lose its just praise; but the unprofitable servant shall be excluded from any participation in the joy of his Lord.

(185°).

S E R M O N VIII.

M A T T. VI. 24.

Whoſoever heareth theſe ſayings of mine, and doeth them I will liken him unto a wiſe man which built his houſe upon a rock.

I N the acknowledgement of the ſon of GOD as the author of our ſalvation, and our hope, the faith of aſſent conſiſts; a quality which as ſoon as it is produced, denominates a man a believer, by virtue of which character, he is admitted to become a partaker of all the preſent privileges conferred by the grace of GOD. But as faith is the principle of the life of the believer, it exhibits various characteristic qualities, both profeſſional and practical. Theſe qualities are continually improving, and produce by perfeverance, and application to the functions of his

his high calling, in his respective station and capacity, the qualifications, which at the awful judgment of mankind will be demanded of him, as the improvement requisite to his final acceptance.

In this investigation, the duty has appeared most naturally branched out into these two kinds, professional and practical, both gradual: the first is absolutely appropriate to the christian, though bearing a visible analogy to the human obligations under every former dispensation: the other is in some sense common to all religions, though bearing in this, the strongest characteristic marks of the professional principles with which it is united. Both of these are necessary, both essential in true faith. Though this be so evident a truth; yet there have ever been men, zealously addicted to an opinion in religion; who have placed the whole duty of a christian in receiving a particular system, as the object of their firm attachment. This their system, exclusively of all others, they have distinguished with the appellation of christian doctrine, and submission to it, with the honourable denomination of faith. Like the Pharisees in the time of our Saviour, they have drawn up forms of confession, arbitrary in a great measure, and then demanded that
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all Christendom should bow down to the idol which they had set up. Moreover, in the warmth of their zeal on this occasion they usually surpass the Babylonian monarch himself, by denouncing death, not only temporal but eternal, against every infidel, as they call him; or in other words, against every man who thinks differently from themselves. Were the tenets for which these zealots contend so strenuously, the important doctrines of our salvation, those doctrines which must of necessity enter into the confession of every believer; or were they the plain precepts upon which the christian discipline is formed, and by which its practice is regulated: a profession of them, zealous in a degree, would be highly becoming; and were the zeal even to exceed the bounds of strict discretion somewhat, it might be excusable from the infirmity of human nature. But important doctrines are too clearly manifested, to require the enforcements of zeal to support them; which therefore, with a fury, more than barbarian, contends for tenets, unimportant; points of dogma neither clearly ascertained in the word of God, nor intelligible in any construction of them. Such conceit of opinion, or zeal so destructive of peace and charity can by no means
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be reconciled with that meekness and modesty which most strongly characterize a true christian faith. And moreover, the consequences of placing the whole of a believer's obligations in confession, according to a particular system, are extremely fatal to christian discipline, by tending to produce a neglect of the moral precepts, and of the dispositions they are calculated to produce. Such a religion as this, which has no support in the testimony of conscience, differs widely from the principles of St Paul, according to his own description^a: and though his authority is most commonly alledged for it, he seems to reprobate expressly in these words, all such interpretations of doctrine, as place faith and a good conscience in opposition: “^b this charge I commit unto thee son Timothy, that thou mightest war a good warfare; holding faith and a good conscience: which some having put away, concerning faith have made shipwreck. Of whom are Hymeneus and Alexander, whom I have delivered to Satan, that they may learn not to blaspheme.” Our Lord also himself has plainly made the conduct of the christian, the test of his faith; and

^a Acts. c. 24. v. 16.^b 1 Tim. c. 1. v. 18.

declared

declared^c that, in that awful day, when he will finally accept or reject those, who now profess themselves his disciples, it shall not avail any one to call on him for salvation, whose practice has not been conformable to his precepts; no not though he could justly assert, that he had prophesied, and wrought miracles in his name.

But if it be an error of dangerous tendency thus to lay the whole stress of religion upon speculative assent and profession; the opposite extreme has also a fatal tendency to defeat the purposes of the gospel, through defect of principle. By those who disapprove of the conduct of the Antinomians, and the zeal of all religionists; it seems to be adopted as a first principle, that they need only concern themselves to follow the moral dictates of their understanding: for as all zealots lay claim to the authority of scripture, in support of every dogma imposed by them as an article of confession, necessary to salvation; these others, too careless to examine the authority of such a claim, lay aside and neglect to consult the gospel as a religion; as if it were only calculated to puzzle men with knotty questions: and think they fully fa-

^c Matt. c. 7. v. 21.

tisfy

tisfy their obligations, if they transgress not against the laws of their country, and the customs and expectations of the world. It is very true, that a bad life is the worst of all heresies. It must also be acknowledged, that many questions which have been represented as important doctrines, have very little real connection with christianity. Nevertheless it cannot in reason be supposed unimportant, whether a man be acquainted or not with the truths delivered by GOD for his instruction; nor are the discourses of the author of our salvation of such small consequence, that it should not signify whether they were or were not attended to. For, inattention to the means whereby the redemption of mankind has been effected, must render every religious profession merely formal and inefficacious; and also greatly enervate the principle of hope, which is so necessary in the christian warfare. And moreover the want of acquaintance with the precepts of Christ and the inspired teachers, will be very inadequately compensated by a strict attention to the demands of national laws, to the expectations of men of business in their intercourse with each other, even though the obligations of honour and good nature, according to the general estimation,

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be superadded. For (I speak as to wise men) the maxims of all, even the refined classes of mankind, have deviated from the purity of the gospel, by length of time, and the^d prevalence of iniquity; which at intervals has abounded in every part of Christendom: so that in books^e no less than in living characters, they have fallen far short of the standard of original christian precept. It is therefore highly necessary that diligent application and continual reference be made to the word of GOD: in order that the branch of Christ may continue inseparably united to its true vine, in principle and sentiment; deriving his information perpetually, as the principles of his vegetation, from that root, and only genuine source of spiritual nourishment.

The truly christian character, the conduct of him whose hopes and religion are founded on a substantial basis, lies therefore between these two extremes, where a religious and devout attention is paid to all the truths that are taught of GOD: an attention terminating in conformity. Our Saviour's description of the wise man who built his house upon a rock most fully speaks this language:

^d Matt. c. 24. v. 12.^e Cic. Tusc. Quest. L. III.

and

and St James' describes the believer's obligations in the same manner: "receive with
 " meekness the engrafted word which is
 " able to save your souls. But be ye doers
 " of the word and not hearers only, deceiving
 " your own selves. For if any man be a
 " hearer of the word and not a doer, he is
 " like unto a man beholding his natural face
 " in a glass: for he beholdeth himself, and
 " goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth
 " what manner of man he was. But whoso
 " looketh into the perfect law of liberty and
 " continueth therein, he being not a for-
 " getful hearer but a doer of the work, this
 " man shall be blessed in his deed."

Were I qualified to sum up the character of perfect faith; of faith, in which whatever is excellent in profession is blended with whatever in practice is accomplished, it would excite, as Cicero said of virtue, could it be exemplified to our view, the most astonishing admiration of itself. But as it exceeds the human capacity to frame a complete delineation of the principle, so various, so excellent, so on all sides separate from error; in like manner the qualifications that contribute to make up the accomplished christian

¹ C. I. V. 21.

are

are too refined to enter the conception of any but a proficient in the word. Nay more, were even such a one to attempt himself to express the character; he would fail to render it an object of general view, and adequate estimation; unless he could also, with a power equal to that which his master exercised, give sight at the same time to the blind. For while the spiritual^s man is exalted to such eminence, that from thence he can clearly see and estimate the principles of all other men; he is himself a character so far abstracted from vulgar apprehension, as that he alone can be judged of no man.

But if any novice in spiritual things should be led to give credit to the suggestions of prejudiced unbelievers, and suspect that this circumstance is owing to something visionary or enthusiastic in the christian's principles, something that will not bear the scrutiny of the severest reason; St Paul's description of the whole armour of GOD, viewed attentively, will teach him to form a different opinion of the characteristic accomplishments of the believer. He will then perceive that the qualifications of such a man are exquisitely chaste and correct, and that

^s 1 Cor. c. 2.

the only account to be given, why they are not generally understood, comprehended, and admired, proceeds, as is no uncommon case, from the comparatively low and defective moral conceptions of those who pretend to estimate them. “^b Stand, says the apostle, “ having your loins girt about with truth, “ and having on the breastplate of righteousness; and your feet shod with the “ preparation of the gospel of peace; above “ all taking the shield of faith, wherewith “ ye shall be able to quench all the fiery “ darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the “ spirit, which is the word of God: praying “ always with all prayer and supplication, “ in the spirit, and watching thereunto with “ all perseverance.”

In this description, the girdle of truth stands in the foremost rank of the christian’s qualifications. What our Lord once said to his followers may serve to render this vague expression more determinate. “ⁱ If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth, “ and the truth shall make you free.” To know the truth, implies to have an adequate

^b Ephes. c. 6. v. 14, 17.

ⁱ Jo. c. 8. v. 31.

perception

perception of the doctrine of GOD; with a persuasion of its certainty in every article, and an impression of the use and necessity of the dispensation. Such a possession is the fruit of attentive consideration of GOD's word, its tenor, and its tendency. From such knowledge all christian principle is derived; and as is the knowledge in degree of proficiency, such in proportion will be the principles, in excellence and accomplishment. The next qualification mentioned is "the breastplate of righteousness;" which is conversant in all virtue, and emulates whatever is most truly becoming in every moral relation. Let it therefore be considered as a firm and manly resolution to adhere to whatever in christian morals is just, pure, lovely, and of good report. Thus, the character given by Horace^{*} of the bravely just man, and steady to his purpose, will not unaptly express this part of the characteristic of the christian; by exhibiting a man whom no seduction can bend, no terror can shake from his faithful and virtuous resolution. The next qualification is "the preparation of the gospel of peace." There is an obscurity in this phrase from the use of the

^{*} Lib. III. Ode, 3.

word preparation in a form not common. In the language of Chemistry, a preparation of any thing implies its accommodation by a process to a particular purpose: but even this sense, though it comes near, does not amount to the meaning of the *Ετοιμασία ευαγγελίου*. Let the exhortation be placed by itself, and it will run thus: "be shod with " the preparation of the gospel of peace:" And the gospel will be found represented as the furniture, the apparatus of the christian, wherewith¹ as with greaves of brass he is guarded from annoyance; an accommodation that results from that peace and serenity, that persuasion of principle, and confidence, which flow from a well instructed profession of the gospel. The next qualification is the "shield of faith." On this occasion let faith be understood generally as a deference to the word of GOD: which word, if applied as it was by our Saviour against the assaults or temptations of the enemy, serves as a shield for defence, and a sword for the vindication of the christian cause. Let faith then be considered as an implicit passive obedience to the word of GOD, and it becomes a principle by which the point of every weapon

¹ Whitby.

that

that is aimed against the christian is received, while he remains secure under its shelter. The next qualification is "the helmet of salvation:" the hope of salvation, as St Paul^m expresses the same sentiment in another place. While the christian's treasureⁿ, his hopes and ruling passion centre in the rewards of the gospel, every desire, that points to an object short of them, will fail to captivate and ensnare him. The last weapon of his warfare mentioned is "the sword of the spirit, which is the word of God." By this he is qualified to become the assailant in his turn; for taught in this word the road to victory, and by what exertions to acquire it, he is enabled to press forward, and obtain an eternal triumph, the prize of his high calling in Christ Jesus.

Such are the christian's qualifications, constructed of accomplished professional and practical qualities united. If rational religion could speak her simple genuine language, she would strive by precept and exhortation to produce the same ends as our holy religion pursues: and even as to the means, she would extoll accomplishments analogous to these as excellent, and recom-

^m 1 Thes. c. 5. v. 8.ⁿ Matt. c. 6. v. 21.

mend them as highly instrumental, in cultivating wisdom, virtue, prudence, with discretion.

But in the course of time the state and appearance of the profession of christianity have varied. In the age of the apostles, those to whom the gospel was proposed, and out of whom the conversions were made, were arrived at years of discretion. When they embraced the christian profession, they were induced to it by their judgment or sense of its truth, its importance, its advantages. They entered the church therefore with faith in Christ Jesus. But, notwithstanding, it is not to be imagined that the qualifications of the accomplished christian sprang up in them immediately in any great degree. The sense with which they were impressed, the judgment they had formed, and by which they were influenced when they embraced the gospel, were calculated to produce in them speedily a share of these qualifications; which, as they made a christian proficiency, would rise in proportion to still higher and higher accomplishment. In the lively impression of the power of the word of Christ, which every true convert felt, when he entered into the church; in the mortified spirit which went before, pre-disposing

disposing him to seek for resource, and pointing out to him the necessity of applying to Christ for redemption, and an effectual and satisfactory religion; he found (to use a former phrase) a great preparation of mind to the cultivation and proficiency of faith. But even at that time there were not a few instances of persons, who having entered the lists in the christian race, afterwards swerved to contention and vain jangling, to the neglect of^o godly edifying, which is in faith. And other sad examples there were, of persons, who denied the faith into which they had been baptized; and became apostates, to their final reprobation and perdition. Of these last, some^p there were, whatever their pretences might be, who really never were possessed of a true mortification, or were qualified to make a sincere profession, the previous requisites to christian regeneration. And moreover, St Paul^q is not speaking of a case that never occurred, where he states it as impossible to renew again unto repentance a person, who hath been once enlightened, and hath tasted of the heavenly gift, and been made partaker of the Holy Ghost, and hath tasted the good word of God, and the powers

^o 1 Tim. c. i. v. 4.

^p Acts. c. 8. v. 18.

^q Heb. c. 6. v. 4.

of

of the world to come: if such a one should fall away.

However, certain it is: that in the lively sense of the use and efficacy of the word of Christ, which then preceded baptism, the converts of those times had advantages; which those have not, who are baptized in infancy, and in consequence of an act of faith, not their own, but of their christian parents. Wherefore, if it were true of them as Christ declared^{*} it would be, that of the many called in those times few only were admitted: and also that of those who expressed some wishes to enter at the strait gate, a small number found the narrow path that leadeth unto life; while the majority seduced and perverted by some or other of the manifold temptations to which they all were liable, failed of producing the requisite qualifications: much more reason is there to fear; that of the number now admitted without any choice of their own, still fewer arrive at the degree of professional and practical faith required of them. For the infants, brought to baptism by the faith and zeal of their parents, and received into the church through a charity, well warranted, are not

^{*} Matt. c. 7. v. 13.

certainly

certainly capable, at that time, of the previous dispositions of mind requisite to our high calling. And it is still with them a very possible case, that though they continue all their life time nominal professors, they may never be properly qualified, even by the faith of assent, for initiation into the christian covenant. If indeed to inform them of certain truths were all that was necessary so to qualify them, catechisms, or any digests that laid down the important doctrines plainly and explicitly, would fully answer the purpose of conveying such information. But as the gospel is not only to be assented to as truth, but embraced as an object of desire, something more is necessary than barely to inform the judgment. Mr. Locke speaks very fully indeed to the same purpose, where he says of moral virtue. “^a Let a man be never so
 “ well persuaded of the advantages of it;
 “ that it is necessary to a man, who has any
 “ great aims in this world, or hopes in the
 “ next, as food to life: yet till he hungers
 “ and thirsts after righteousness, till he feels
 “ an uneasiness in the want of it, his will
 “ will not be determined to any action in
 “ pursuit of this confessed greater good;

^a Essay, Vol. I. p. 206.

but

“ but any other uneasiness he feels in himself shall take place, and carry his will to other actions.” If this be true of virtue or moral truth, of which man in the midst of all his depravity had an inherent admiration naturally and indelibly impressed; how much more of a dispensation, how gracious, how desirable soever it really be, to which man is not conducted by any instinct? Will books, will exhortation, will instruction infallibly pour persuasion, impress conviction on the mind? Will they also give an inclination seriously to ponder, and consider the importance, the advantages of this religion? Will they give a tractable temper to obey and conform to the precepts of it? If not, they cannot be sufficient in themselves to excite that uneasiness of desire, by which alone the gospel can be rendered an object of pursuit, of cultivation. At such distance is the baptized infant behind the persuaded convert of the apostolic churches. His institution should of course be different. It should be his first important care to acquire a just moral sense, that he may see the necessity of religion to that rational serenity of mind which constitutes man’s truest happiness. After this let him study to know himself, let him enter into the severest scrutiny of
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of his habitual, his constitutional weakneses and defects, let him probe his deepest wounds and drain the bitterest dregs of the suggestions of conscience; fearless of the pangs of sorrow and remorse. For the doctrine of the gospel will afford him speedy consolation: and with resource at hand so availing as this, his sorrow will have an event so different from the sorrow of the world or of mere natural conscience; that while these, hopeless of remedy, end in death or desperation, the sorrow of the christian worketh peace. Nor is the process long, by which so desirable a cure will be effected: for let the mind but be free from the prejudice of conceit, let the eye but be open to the truth, and the evidences of christianity will not fail to command the highest assent. Thus the convert, like the infirm woman^a, satisfied by repeated testimony that Christ is the power of God unto salvation, will make the experiment in faith, and assurance of success. And the event of such experiment will justify that confidence, of which it is also the reward; for in the oblation of the Son of God, he will perceive a perfect sacrifice, expiation and satisfaction for all his offences.

^a 2 Cor. c. 7. v. 10.^a Mark. c. 5. v. 28.

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When thus prepared he becomes effectually a believer, and by baptism also truly regenerate. But in leading the life of faith, the christian does not find himself discharged from duty. There is nothing accomplished in arts and sciences, nothing excellent in virtuous habit, to be attained without pains and application. In like manner the accomplished qualities, which distinguish the man that is truly led by the spirit of God, are not so formed but by patience, watchfulness, diligence in the work of sanctification. Beginning therefore at that lively impression which denominated baptismal faith, and made the profession an act of judgment, the convert proceeds to consider distinctly that word which contains the doctrines to which he has subscribed. From such application, if made with due deference, arise a knowledge and perception of the various and important truth contained in the word of God. From such a faith, thus associated with knowledge, flow as from a perennial spring, the qualifications of the christian. From hence that steadiness of principle, when the mind, persuaded of the wisdom, the prudence of its selections, is neither to be beguiled nor forcibly turned from its virtuous purpose. From thence the preparation
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of the christian to pursue the rugged and thorny path of virtue, in a hostile country; preparation by the peace, and serenity not to be embroiled, that inseparably attend the steps of christian virtue. From this persuasion of the truth and efficacy of the word of G O D, proceeds that implicit deference to its dictates, the shield of faith. From thence the assured hope of salvation; and from thence, in short, every weapon of the christian warfare, by which the believer is enabled to become a conqueror in the hour of trial, and to wrestle with success, against the utmost powers of the spiritual adversary of his salvation. But though these qualifications be, all of them, the fair progeny of that first lively faith, they are not produced all at once; nor have they, at their first appearance, either the firm texture, or the excellence which they afterwards acquire in the course of gradual improvement. For (it is a truth never to be overlooked) the christian's renunciation of the world is not completed on a sudden: but in his noviciate, frequently seduced, and beguiled at intervals, he finds all the natural and spiritual aids of his religion necessary to restore him, when occasionally estranged, to his spiritual mind; and renew his strength from time to time.

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It is late in life, 'ere the prejudices of sense and appetite be so far removed, as to suffer the good seed to spread and grow without interruption. When these thorns are effectually rooted out; or, if that be not to be expected while man lives under the veil of human frailty, when they are deprived of a great share of their rank luxuriancy: then the excellent qualities that denominate the christian begin to display an accomplished character; then reason, judgment, discretion, are set at liberty from the byas that hung upon them, and then may a man both think and act freely, when no longer necessitated and enslaved.

If therefore the declaration of our Lord, that the man is wise, who heareth and practiseth his sayings, be understood to have respect to the principles upon which he acts; they are justly denominated a foundation immoveable as a rock. Such a man is in the only rational sense a free-thinker, and wise moreover, if such an attribute (in the philosophical interpretation) do justly belong to man. For if to be at rest from the perturbations of sensual appetite, if to possess the mind sequestered from the turmoils of the world, the judgment simple, and untinged with the jaundice of evil prejudice, if these
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be requisite to freedom of thought, who is there so eminently qualified to exert it as the christian, prepared, as he is, by his repentance? Nor is such freedom separated from the truest wisdom; for if it be a just definition of wisdom, the possession of a perfect mind, separate from error: then wisdom most eminently belongs to the man, who possesses in an untainted mind, the principles that are derived from consummate truth, let down from heaven as a sure lamp, to guide mankind in the perception of truth". Nor let the inquirer start, deluded by the fallacious imagination of judging for himself, when informed that the truest wisdom is to be sought by following prescription. The case is the same in all science as in christian philosophy. A true taste, and accomplished discernment are always formed in the same manner: the same strict adherence to rule and precept being requisite in both, to the cultivation of a refined and accurate judgment. Let this distinction however be remembered to the praise of christian discipline. No philosophy ever could justly boast such an ascendancy as this, that the spiritual man, by the superior principles of his di-

" Jo. c. 16. v. 13.

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vine philosophy, is exalted to an eminence, that subjects all things to his judgment; while he himself, a superior character, is placed out of the reach of all *, that supreme discerner excepted, from whom his chaste principles are derived.

But alas ! neither the perfect free thinker, nor the absolutely wise or spiritual man, are ever realized in living characters. We believe that such a one existed in the person of our redeemer. And what was the consequence ? “ ‘ The light shined in darkness, “ and the darkness comprehended it not.” The divine character, so far from being held in deserved admiration, was too refined for the gross conceptions of the beholders. And what wonder ? Even Socrates, whose distinguishing conception lay in disclaiming wisdom, a sentiment expressed in that golden sentence : “ ‘ God alone is wise,” so far from being heard with candour and favourable attention, was persecuted, derided, and at last, to the eternal disgrace of Athens, sacrificed to the spleen of the sophists, and the witlings of his age. The same causes operated in the same manner, upon the persons, whose station made them the judges

* 1 Cor. c. 2. v. 15.

y Jo. c. 1. v. 5.

z Plato Apol.

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of Christ's commission. "For these inflated men, ignorant of God's righteousness and going about to establish their own righteousness, were so far from submitting themselves to the righteousness that is of God," that they set at nought and crucified the author of the common salvation. And the same causes will produce the same effects to the end of time.

But it may be said: if the sincerity and freedom of thought be not to be attributed to man, if wisdom be taken from him, what real accomplishment is there left him to pursue? Prudence remains, or christian soberness; effectual, if exercised according to the precepts of our holy religion, to the purposes of acquiring^b present tranquillity, and the never failing consolation of assured hope. Here then is a character, at the same time truly christian, and prudent in a philosophical idea, according to the justest estimate of human conduct. But who can describe the various qualities, attentions, sentiments, that constitute christian soberness? Words will ever fail in such attempts. For if the heart have no disposition towards them, no pre-sentiment of them; it will not be touched

^a Rom. c. 10. v. 3.

^b Serm. I.

by the description, which will appear through a false medium: but if the heart be already possessed by them, words will fall far short of expressing the excellencies of them as they are felt. The christian lives in the profession of a religion sent down from heaven, which to perceive accurately and distinctly, and to draw to himself all the advantages of the dispensation, in the fullest degree he can, employ his most earnest care. He studies therefore to know where to seek, and how to apply all the spiritual aids promised, and all the resources of his religion, that he may be prepared against those occasions wherein the deceitfulness of false and erroneous appearances may embarrass and intangle him. He carefully forms his judgment and his manners by its precepts, and by conforming himself to them, strives to correct, amend and improve daily his constitution of mind, his temper, his habits of thinking and acting: that so, he may be furnished in all circumstances, to every christian sentiment, and work emulous of his profession. He labours to acquaint himself with every peculiar doctrine, that can prove to him a motive, an encouragement or consolation in the practice of his several offices. In short, he is diligent to form a mind and character truly and entirely

tirely christian. On either hand of the articles of his profession he finds many points of dogma introduced, strange, intricate, but unimportant: for these he has but little leisure and less inclination; while secured by his knowledge of the truth, he is already in possession of the assurance of faith, the peace and firm persuasion of principle. From these questions however he experiences but small embarrassment, in comparison of that which arises daily in his intercourse with the world. He is endued with a constitution the appetites of which, he lives in a world the prevalent and ruling objects of which, all conspire to distract his mind, to blind his judgment, so that he may not see at all times, attend to, and pursue his true interest. These delusions, at all times such, change their face and form of attack through every period of life; a circumstance which increases his difficulties, of acting a rational christian part, and renders the conflict perpetual, by which in all his judgments he strives to separate himself from these sources of perverse choice, and to conform himself to that word which he professes to follow. From the patient and persevering exercise of such prudence, arise advantages equal to the utmost expectations that man can form of a religion or rational

